WORLDS OF IF
SCIENCE FICTION
OCTOBER 1975 95¢
S*M
14155
40p

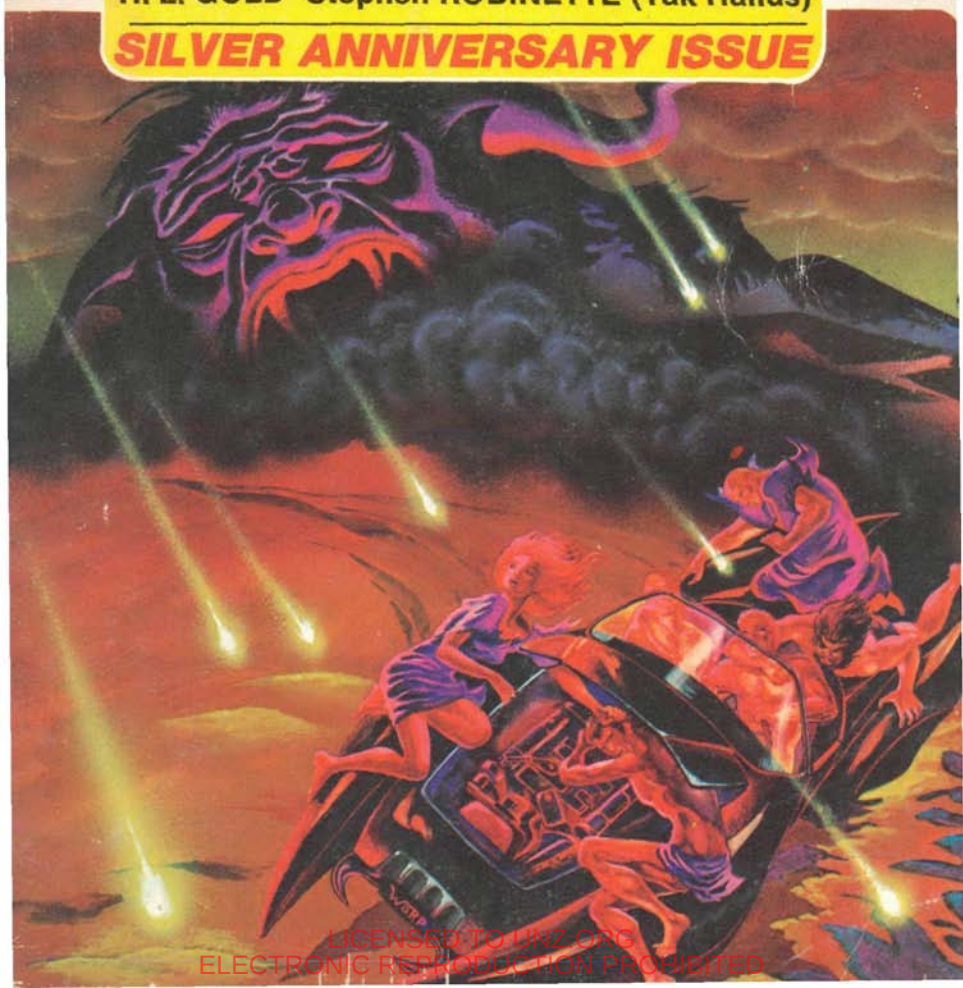
Galaxy

Joanna Russ
THE EXPERIMENTER

LARRY NIVEN J. E. POURNELLE

H. L. GOLD Stephen ROBINETTE (Tak Hallus)

SILVER ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

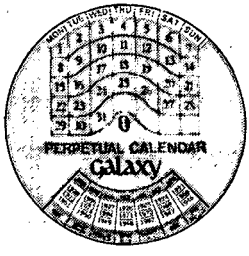


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Extra-Spatial OFFER!

Best we ever make

Biggest bargain in galaxy now in your hands! Get 9 full months of the finest science fiction writing at a special low introductory rate. Less than 1/100th of a solar credit—just $7.50 U.S./Earth money with the coupon below brings you mind-expanding ideas and far-out adventures conceived by some of the most brilliant and imaginative authors alive today! Plus the unusual free gift described below to let you project the future for years and years from now. Just attach your check or money order to coupon and mail it to us to start your subscription and receive your gift.



YOURS FREE!

This time-computer dial lets you look backward and forward in time! Were you born on a Tuesday? What day will your birthday fall on in 1997? Will Christmas be on a weekend in the year 2000? You'll have the answers at your fingertips with this perpetual calendar! Mail the coupon at right with your remittance today.

BEST OFFER EVER!

Use this coupon to take advantage of this special subscription + gift offer from GALAXY.

9 ISSUES . . . $7.50
with FREE Perpetual Calendar.

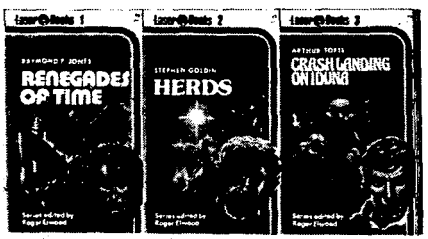
Name: _____
Street: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____

Mail With Remittance To:
GALAXY MAGAZINE
350 Kennedy Drive
Hauppauge, New York 11787

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Laser Experience

Introducing a bold new series of SF adventure.



LASER BOOKS.
Brave new worlds of adventure. A bright new concept in science fiction.

The "People" factor

Fantasy and philosophy—that's where most SF is at today. With little emphasis on the characters. But LASERS are about people—people you can believe; experiencing the unbelievable.

America's top SF Editor

Roger Elwood, one of the best SF editors in the world, has personally selected the novels for this unique new series...stories that do more than astonish your senses. They turn on your emotions as well.

Each month... three new books

LASER publishes three original novels every month (the first six are available now). Sold in bookstores everywhere for just 95¢ each, and featuring distinctive cover art by Kelly Freas, they're becoming the foundation of serious SF and adventure reader's libraries.

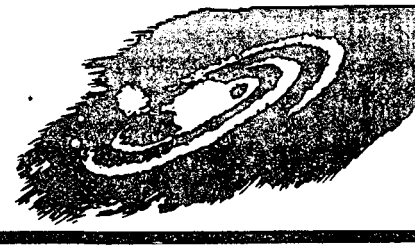
LASER BOOKS. Diverse, stimulating novels—the kind you'll enjoy again and again. Provocative. Penetrating. And habit-forming.

Laser Books
New Worlds of Adventure.
Laser Reader Service, MPO Box 788, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OCTOBER 1975
Vol. 36, No. 9

Galaxy SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE



Arnold E. Abramson, *Publisher*

Jay Tunick, *Circulation Director*
L. C. Murphy, *Subscriptions Dept.*
C. M. Bolling, *Ass't. to the Editor*

J. E. Pournelle, Ph.D., *Science Editor*
Theodore Sturgeon, *Consulting Editor*
Spider Robinson, *Contributing Editor*

James Baen, *Editor*

NOVELETTES

THE EXPERIMENTER, Joanna Russ 5
"Curiousity killed the cat," they say. Obviously a miscontruction has been placed on this bit of folk-wisdom over the years—what it really means is "I wonder what would happen to the cat if I. . ."

BUT LOYAL TO HIS OWN, David Drake 40
The story of Hammer's indomitable Slammers has been chronicled both here and in that "Certain Other" magazine (yes, the one with rivets), as well as in Gordy Dickson's COMBAT. Here is how it all began. . .

HELBENT 4, Stephen Robinette 106
Wherein, against all odds, an intrepid warrior returns from victorious battle with the dreaded Spacethings, only to find that the Earth he has saved seems strangely altered—quite retarded, in fact!

SHORT STORIES

THE END RESULT, W.S. Doxey 30
A whimsical tale of interplanetary exploration wherein the Explorer becomes the Explored.

NO MOTHER NEAR, Pat Murphy 128
The Ultimate in sensory deprivation.

CRUSADE, Norman E. Hartman 147
Dean Okara knew that it was only a matter of time before the alien derrai penetrated his scoutship's last defence—but every second he could delay the inevitable increased Earth's hope of final victory!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SERIAL (Part III of III)

INFERNO, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle **63**
Hell or Inferno land? At last the question is answered. . .or is it?

FEATURES

THE EDITOR'S PAGE, James Baen **4**
The Editor discourses on matters of national importance—if only THEY would listen!

FORUM, Horace L. Gold **20**
LOOKING AFT—It is fitting that in this Silver Anniversary Issue the man who founded Galaxy should survey the terrain he pioneered so many years ago; herewith, Gold on Gold.

A STEP FARTHER OUT, Jerry Pournelle **98**
IN THE BEGINNING—Or, A Quiet Afternoon of Lovecraftian Horror. In "Looking Aft," Horace claims that every time he makes a move the world suffers a catastrophe. This time it is The End of Science as We Know It!

THE ALIEN VIEWPOINT, Richard E. Geis **122**
Geis takes a switch to Alter.

BOOKSHELF, Spider Robinson **140**
An honest-to-god innovation in investigative book-reviewing—Notes from the Bookstore!

DIRECTIONS **156**
Letters from Woods, Pohl, Smith, Sheridan, Adams.

SHOWCASE, Freff **161**
HARLEQUIN NOVA. A Commedia in the Old Style, 2174.

Cover by Pini & Pini, from INFERNO
Interior Illustrations by Ames, Dalzell, Freff, Kirk, Pini

GALAXY, incorporating *Worlds of If* is published monthly by UPD Publishing Corporation, a subsidiary of Universal Publishing & Distributing Corporation. Arnold E. Abramson, President. Main Offices: 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Single copy: $1.00. 12-issue subscription: $12.00 in U.S., $13.00 elsewhere.

Copyright © 1975 by UPD Publishing Corporation under International, Universal and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and additional mailing offices. The publishers assume no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

AD ASTRA PER . . .

America's Defense Budget has come to require so massive a portion of the nation's wealth that it is no longer possible to convince politicians that we can afford any more significant national goal than mere survival. And yet, to forego the means of waging war would itself inevitably lead to war, and a losing one at that.

This coldly militaristic equation is the central dilemma of our time; without capital expenditures so massive that—barring an unforeseeable basic restructuring of our society—even the Federal Government cannot pay for them, we are trapped in a world situation of diminishing supplies and rising demands, a dawning age of ever-tightening resources that can end only in a bang or in a whimper. And yet we *must* maintain a level of armaments so expensive that seemingly we can afford nothing else. But there may be a way out. . .

Consider. Are there not weapons that are plowshares as well? Example: the anti-missile lasers described in the February '75 *Galaxy* are also potential orbital-launch devices—and their power sources would be of sufficient magnitude to provide a significant increment to the nation's generating capacity. And since the only answer to anti-missile lasers would be orbital *anti*-anti-missile lasers—solar-panel or fusion powered "space fortresses"—then if we decide to invest in laser anti-missile systems, we had best invest in the means of protecting them as well; Space Shuttles that could easily be converted into orbital warships. *Lots* of them.

And of course while our fleets of orbital fighters—pardon me; space shuttles—are not busy taking out hypothetical space fortresses, there would certainly be no sense in just letting them sit there getting rusty. No, they should be kept busy: building orbital factories that would be *highly* cost-effective, given cheap shuttle service; terraforming Venus (see September *Galaxy*—what would a new planet be worth?); setting up Lunar research facilities; disposing of nuclear wastes; building a fleet of real spaceships for manned exploration of the Solar System. . .and since our friends across the way will doubtless be constructing their own ABM laser system, perhaps we need space fortresses, too; whose power source when not in military use could be beaming down energy via microwave. But you get the idea.

Speaking of ideas, there must be lots of possible weapons-systems with dual sword/plowshare components. Let's hear about them. It's your world, too.

—BAEN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOANNA RUSS

There are those who believe that functional intelligence is equivalent to technological sophistication. Obviously Joanna is not among them. Nor is—

THE EXPERIMENTER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WELL, GENTLEMEN! Another two seconds and I would have been dead, lying with a knife in my throat on the deck of one of the ugliest yachts ever built—killed by my own friends, gentlemen!

What? Put this thing on my head so I can understand as well as be understood? (For I take it that's what your gestures mean.) What a pity. So instantaneous. We could have taken six months; you draw little diagrams, you teach me the words for past, future, present,—I fall to my knees calling you gods—Sorry.

I'll stop joking.

Three months ago—no, of course I can't tell you what year it was unless I can put our two calendars together; what does a number like twenty-two something-something mean to me?—anyway, the whole thing started three months ago when the barbarian and the boy and I were riding off the Southern coast of—never mind; names change so, even locally. It was nighttime. Our barbarian, with his uncivilized addiction to cleanliness, was taking a bath in the sea, and the boy was scraping the dinner pots. I was leaning over the rail, watching our wake, that true Southern phosphorescence you never see anywhere else, that luminosity that seems at any moment about to condense into the bodies of the drowned, the souls of the dead, floating up and drifting just under the surface of the water, whispering perhaps, smiling, gliding . . .

Then the boy gave a yell and I nearly pitched over the side. The three of us stared. Then the clouds must have parted or some low mist blown aside. There it was.

"A town," said our barbarian, Sam.

What's funny? The machine does the translating, not me, doesn't it? I told you we saw a town and I told you Sam said so; and after months at sea you are supposed to go wild; you think of *restaurants*, you think of *women*, you think of *money*, though not necessarily in that order.

All except me.

Now I want to explain this right now; in what I did I was never for a moment actuated by personal malice. I'm a sociable man; I like people and I like to see them enjoy themselves. But once in a while . . . never mind, perhaps I've sold my soul to the devil or he sold his to me! Anyway, Sam was the first to speak, all *pronunciamento* and seven feet tall.

"Everyone," he said, "must take a bath except me, because I have already had one."

"Oh gods, I have to shave," said the boy.

"Not with my knife," I said. I've never met anyone so mad for growing up. I had stowed our good clothes somewhere months before and was looking for them behind some of our coiled rope and other gear when I collided with my tall friend. I have always called them

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my friends, gentlemen, but the truth is I have never understood them. Never at all. I put my hand on his shoulder to stop him and said, "Look here, what do you want? What do you really want?" He looked back at me in the half-dark, above the lantern we keep in the bow, and his face looked like a statue carved out of stone but that was only a trick of the light because these Northerners' eyes are blue and you can look right through blue eyes into the sky behind, like looking through the eye-holes of a skull.

"To be rich," he said. I've never understood that. The boy will end up going home, of course, because this is only a vacation for him—but I—

"Look," I called after Sam, "I'll get it for you. A fortune. For both of you."

We landed at night. A nice clean little harbor with native craft, mostly; you couldn't have told, give or take fifty miles, where you were. You've never landed on the commercial waterfront of a small city at night, have you?—indeed, with a room full of such extremely interesting equipment, why should you?—No, of course not. Well, you can have no conception of such a place unless you've been there. It is exactly the same, wherever you are. It is sinister and it is homely. The shadows are deep, the streets narrow, here and there a light above an inn or coming out of an open doorway, and higher up you get the poor quarter, and higher up still the commercial quarter, and if you know towns the way I do (they all fit the land they're on as animals fit the lives they lead) you can work your way to the center in little over an hour. Likewise the politics. I stopped a native.

"Where is Main Street?"

"What?" he said.

"Great Street," I said, "Large Street, Wide Street, Market Street, Big Street, Important Street—" Thus you run down the list. We found it (Long-and-Large Street), then found we had to register at a government shed, which contained some truly horrendous warnings against coining. When I told them my plan, Sam and the boy didn't oppose me—nobody ever does, somehow, when the fit is on me—so we stripped the ship and sold everything, including the compass, to buy clothes. We had to put on a good show as gentlemen. I told the other two I was going to get arrested and to stick with me; so the next morning, brilliantly dressed, I went up to a flower-seller's booth on Second-Biggest Street, took out our last gold piece, and bought a bouquet. Something called Tyrrhenian Violet Mix, as I remember.

"My dear elevatedness," crooned the florist, "allow me the nearly unbearable pleasure of giving you your change." The gold was making him tremble with greed.

"No, no," said I, assuming an unidentifiable foreign accent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But yes," he said. "But please. Allow me. Make me happy!" He doubled up over the counter like a snail.

"Oh well," said I; "If you insist, give me one small coin for this darling child who assists you in tying up the flowers and I will place it in his hand myself."

He gave me my change. I looked at it casually; I stared at it hard; I turned pale; I bit it; I cried:

"Counterfeit!"

One doesn't wish to be arrested for criminal misbehavior, you see; that doesn't get you anywhere. This was a very strictly governed little town. I will mention only in passing the heads stuck on pikes along the battlements of the Governor's palace on High-and-Handsome Street, the lists of taxes, and the license hanging in the inn where we had spent the night. As a common brawler, I would have been in a mess; but here I was the complainant. We were flanked by the local gendarmerie in what must have been record time (thirty seconds), in ten minutes we were in front of a judge, and in fifteen minutes the coin was pronounced genuine. I had rather hoped it wouldn't be.

"Fraud!" I cried.

"Arrest him!" said the judge, waking up for the first time during the entire proceedings.

"For what?" said I. "I have said nothing."

"Quiet!" shouted the judge, really angry this time.

"Only," I continued imperturbably, "Fraud, which in my beautiful, rich, and very far away country signifies distress and extreme pain of mind. I have an imperfect understanding of your magnificent language. Would a wealthy man like myself"—here the courtroom grew very quiet all of a sudden—"would wealthy men like the three of us, I repeat, millionaires with commercial connections all over the known world and in some other places too, be concerned with anything but the principle of law involved in the forging of a small coin? Of course not."

"Alas," I continued, "that I cannot now import into your oh-so-desirable country the gold with which I had hoped to start three or four of my worldwide, extremely moneymaking enterprises. But principle must prevail. Honesty—"

"You're under arrest," said the judge. "And I'll examine you in private. Keep those other two in custody."

"Ah," I said. "Good."

Look here, gentlemen, don't you talk to me about luck. I always know what I'm doing. Once I'd read the notices in that damned registry office!—there were such heavy penalties for bribery, you see. Do laws punish what nobody ever does? His Wisdom got us into an ornate little stone room at the back of the court, fitted up with carpets (and gilding), locked us in, took out a bottle of something—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thanks, no," I said, dropping my accent. "I prefer to talk business." He dropped the bottle. Luckily there was a carpet on the floor, too. He stared at me, but I said nothing. I had my back to the window, which is always nice. He was a silly man; the first thing he did was get up and make for the door.

"Please, please," I said, "I am defenseless. Besides, your admirable door locks with a key, not a bolt or latch, and I managed to abstract the key whilst you were busy with the bottle; I would advise—".

"Murderer!" he said. He had turned pale and was attempting to ring a bell set under the table without my seeing him do it.

"Don't," I said. "Besides, you are quite safe. I'm a reasonable man. I really do like to make money." I smiled. "And I like to see other people make money."

"But you have money already."

"Not a penny I replied." He went for the door again.

"Please," I said. "Please, my dear fellow, do be calm. Do you think I want to hurt or rob you? If I do either, I shall undoubtedly be sawn in half, or whatever nasty method of execution it is you use in this part of the world."

"Then—" he began unhappily.

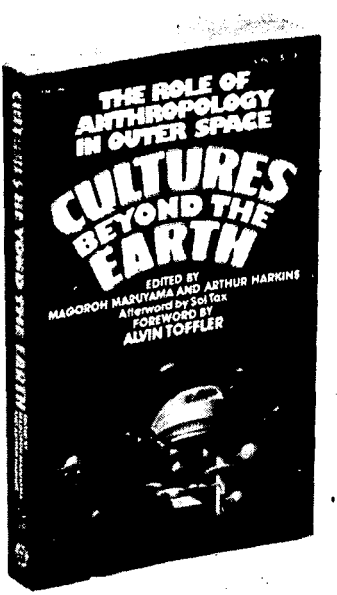
"Why go through such an elaborate farce? That's of course what you were about to say, since you are such an intelligent man. The

The role of anthropology in outer space

How should a space colony be designed? How can it prepare for possible contact with non-human extraterrestrial cultures? In this unique anthology anthropologists, scientists, writers, and an Apollo flight technician speculate on how anthropology as a discipline can help us prepare for the coming age of space travel.

$2.95, paperbound
now at your bookstore

VINTAGE BOOKS
A Division of Random House



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

answer is that for political purposes—which I shall go into presently—I needed to get in touch immediately with someone of great importance. Someone of great intelligence." I spread my hands. "Yourself."

"Polit—" he said.

I leaned forward, speaking in a very low voice.

"I must know," I said. "Are you for the Governor or—"

"Guards!" he screamed. He had backed away from me as far as he could go, bending himself uncomfortably into the doorknob. He turned and rattled it piteously. "Guards!"

"Do," I said, springing to my feet and altering my whole manner. "Do. Protest your loyalty. Swear. Will they believe you?"

He sweated, poised on one foot like a top.

"How do you know who sent me?" I went on grimly. "Eh? How do you know what *they* want, what *they'd* like? How do you know what they've *found out*?"

"Guards," he squeaked. I shrugged elaborately. I threw myself back into my chair. I began to play with the pair of gentleman's gloves I had bought that morning, magnificent things, really, openwork of leather and gold; they seem to make them very well in that region.

"You don't have to make the decision yourself," I said.

"No?" he said.

"No," I said, looking very grave and compassionate. "No indeed. Mind you, I'm only telling you this because of my regard for you. I hate to see people be—but never mind. Don't you think the best thing to do would be send me to —ah—someone higher up? I won't say a word if you do."

He had been standing on one foot all this time, I swear it; now he descended to two, so relieved to be bipedal again. He sighed and wiped his head. He smiled pitifully. He held out one hand—heart-felt—then snatched it back again in evident fear that I would garotte him.

"Never mind," I said. "Not all of us are cut out for the—ah—real complexities of—well, you know what I mean."

"Yes," he said, collapsing into his chair. "Oh yes. I do. Yes, yes, I do."

So that's done.

* * *

Was I at my ease? To tell you the truth, no. But I could deal with him. He was a lean, dry, clean-shaven old man in a voluminous crimson tent. He leaned on two sticks. He made me sit down and then he staggered up to me so that his parchment face leaned over mine, trembling as he said:

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two," said I.

"Ha—hmmmmm." He cleared his throat, and then spat, and then looked absently out of the window of his reception room. You saw the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

marble arches and the whitewashed walls, and trees and hedges outside, very pretty if you didn't notice the soldiers. He gathered the stuff of his robe between two fingers and flashed an enormous ruby on one of them. Vanity. Of some kind.

"Did you think," said he, "that your mummery would succeed?"

I said I thought it would get me to someone like him, but not so high up.

"Have you done anything like this before?" said he, turning sharply round.

"Twice," I said. "But not exactly like this." It's true, too; I have never found it necessary to lie to anyone. People are amazingly prolific at jumping to conclusions. Walk up to any official in a provincial town and say, "They know." Then run.

"Have you any money?" the old man said to me. This obviously didn't interest him.

"None," said I.

"Ha—hmmmmm." He was looking out the window again. "And what do you want? Every man wants something." I stayed silent. He got up and hobbled over to me. "Tell me," he said. I shrugged.

"Tell me or I'll have you—"

"But I don't know!" I said. He limped back and lowered himself into his chair with an extended grimace.

"Nothing," said he, "can ease the pains of old age, young man. Remember that. My people thought you were an assassin. Obvious nonsense, of course. You're mad."

"I've been told so," said I. His eyes glittered.

"You must be," he said. "You don't have money and you don't want it. I'll tell you something, my mad friend: I'm crazy too. We're the only two people in this town who see things as they are. Power is better than money. Now: out with it."

I told him. He laughed until he cried. Then he said:

"How did you know I was in the Duke's faction?"

"I didn't," I said.

"But if I hadn't been—?"

"Oh," I said, "the plan! The plan can be sold to anyone. It can even be turned inside out and used by the Governor; *that* doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what side you're on."

He laughed again, started coughing, stopped, laughed, and then abruptly looked grim. He clapped his hands. Three crafty kids sprang from the thin, thin air.

"This young man," he said sternly, "is my particular guest. Find him and his friends a place to stay. Watch him—but not his friends; I don't think we need go that far yet—at all times." He gave an enormous yawn. "By the way," he added suddenly (darting up to me with wonderful, unsteady quickness) "how did you know there was a—hm—faction?" He thrust his wrinkled face up to mine. I had the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sudden feeling that one of those fresh-faced lads might be ready with a blade in my back. So I told the truth, as I always do.

"There always is," I said. "Everywhere."

* * *

I could say there were times when I felt tempted to take his money and run, but I would be lying. I wouldn't have gone for the world. Besides, the money was Sam's, not mine; whatever I got, I sent to him. My very important lord had settled me in the city and I was buying up grain—with his gold, of course—and dumping it off the coast, secretly, at night.

Do you know what happens when you make something artificially scarce?

That's right, the price goes up. It's like having a bad season. When the price of grain goes up, the price of bread follows; bread is three-quarters of the diet of the poor and when they can't afford it—

Five weeks after my real arrival I arrived again, but this time as a different stranger with a bag of gold a yard long (my lord's gold, of course) under one arm and under the other, elaborate plans for a company that would manufacture fertilizer from sea-sand. The Minister of Finance all but wept in my lap.

Not that he really thought fertilizer could be made from sea-sand, you understand, (though I think he had a few dim gleams of hope on the subject) but any fool with money was a godsend at this time, with the poorer classes so restless. I ordered lumber, building stone, and workmen, and I paid six times as much as anyone else. The price of wheat (their staple commodity, you understand) rose. I raised wages. The price of bread went up even faster. I raised wages again. A starving mob broke into our factory, there were riots in the harbor streets, someone set fire to part of a slum, and the Minister of Finance (standing on the smoking ruins), dedicated the site to a new temple of the Sun-God, swearing that would solve everything. Prices rose. Nobody could understand why—when there was so much money to be had—they couldn't buy anything. Prices rose.

I thought the Minister of Finance would get bold (and ruin everything) by confiscating the merchants' stores for rationing, but trust our boy! he had no desire to be torn limb from limb by enraged grain-dealers. To be absolutely fair I ought to add that the wheat my lord and I had dumped in the sea continued to have a confusing and tenuous life of its own; that is to say, the dummy merchants we had set up reported they were still doing business, so that according to the records, there should have been enough to eat. I think I am the only person in the world who knows that gold does not exist—oh, I don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mean literally, of course, but what good is a yellow, soft metal that you can't eat or burn or make into tools? None at all. It's as if people had all made some crazy agreement to honor it—why not cowrie shells, or cows, or trees, or pieces of rock?

If only everybody agreed and kept the amount of stuff the same, it wouldn't matter what you used. Break that agreement and overnight there would be no town, no possessions, no government, no ownership, no anything. Do you see? Well, no one else ever has. In your own words, here these poor idiots were believing that the "medium of exchange" meant something in itself and by itself, and there *I* was, arranging that there should be more and more medium and less and less to exchange. Prices rose. Rumors began to circulate that the Sun God was angry with the citizens, that gold—which everybody knows is His condensed breath—was losing its power, that soon nights of a week long would descend on the city and every third citizen would be eaten by locusts. Prices rose.

"Never," said the Finance Minister in formal proclamation from a balcony of the palace, while a band played music below him, "does Our Governor hear the complaints of His hungry poor unmoved. His father is the Sun-God Ya; His mother is the silvery Moon-Goddess Yup; how can Their power have been abated? Fear not; you will all be wealthy by and by; Our Governor will not stand by inactive at such an hour," etc. etc.

Then that crazy man raised the salaries of all government employees and distributed a tax rebate to every householder. Prices rose.

Let me make it clear before I utter another word that *there was enough to eat*. They could have gotten through the winter quite well on a strict system of rationing. But who ever did anything unpopular if he could help it? My lord, although by now excessively poor, was overjoyed.

"Am I of use to you or am I not?" I said.

"Indeed you have been," he answered. It hit me some quarter of an hour later, that *have been*.

* * *

I saw it begin with my own eyes. My lord, with the last of his wealth, had been coining money himself—base, obvious, leaden counterfeits—and when the Finance Minister ordered his last, grand, general Bonus (and simultaneously announced his retirement) my lord substituted his false coinage for the Minister's true one.

That did it; I tell you, that did it; you have never seen such a thing as it was.

I was in the street with my lord when it happened, near one of the barrier tables the militia had set up to distribute the coins. A liquor-house keeper tried to palm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off one of them at an old lady's food-stand; she screamed "Police! Police!" just as several others discovered the same thing; and then the whole crowd must have grasped the same fact at exactly the same time, for there was a roar such as I have never heard before in my life, a roar from a thousand throats at once in that one frozen moment before the crowd became a mob and the mob an avalanche.

My lord grasped my elbow and whispered in my ear, "Get out of town," and as I obediently slipped into a side-street, I heard behind me that oceanic tidal-wave of sound and the crash of the first tables going down.

Sam and the boy, thanks be, had put out to sea that afternoon; we'd arranged to meet just out of sight of the bay, North of the harbor. But I had to stay; I had to see it. I tell you, my heart was beating like mad. It was senseless; there was no reason for me to stay but I couldn't leave. It fascinated me. Fighting must have started on the main avenues for I caught glimpses of arrows and men running past the little streets with scythes, butcher knives, poles, anything they could pick up. I tell you, I couldn't stop. They were breaking into stores; it was glorious and horrible, women rushing by pushing baby-wagons piled with fruit or clothes. My lord had apparently hired orators, or perhaps they'd sprung out of the ground; some were touting the Duke as pretender; others were abusing everyone and everything. It was a ghastly mish-mash about the sun going out and the Governor cheating everybody; it would've taken a genius to keep it all straight. I threw away the gold chain my lord had given me and wrapped myself in a dirty cloak I found in the street; it was almost night and torches were being lit at every corner, not that they needed them with the light from bonfires and burning houses. I had stopped to listen to one of the agitators and join in the singing, but I slipped past them. Someone ran through, shouting that people were dying on ———— Street; he disappeared. There was another bonfire.

"—and will we stand it? No, we will not stand it!"

Someone said, "Got some tobacco?" close to me and a hand slipped into my pocket; I twisted it good and hard and moved away into a doorway. Someone else, next to me, struck a light. It was one of my lord's fresh-faced little murderers. He was smiling at me.

"Not bad," he said, "not bad at all, but getting a little out of hand, we think." I followed his glance across the street and there, peering ravenously out of a second-story window, was my very important lord. He grasped the window-sill with one hand and raised the other savagely, bringing it down in a short, cutting arc; from the next doorway peeped out another baby-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face and from the next doorway another. Without thinking (for I go blind in panic) I shinnied up a drainpipe by the doorway and fell on to a roof.

Have you ever run over roofs? Don't. People expect adventurers to be athletic but the only advantage I had was that I was scared to death and—just possibly—the baby-faces got peevish and insisted that while killing people was in their line, climbing roofs wasn't and they weren't paid for it. Not that I stopped to watch, you understand. I jumped gaps in those roofs where I left my stomach behind thirty feet below in the street, and I walked boards you could not have ordinarily persuaded me to try two inches off the ground. Once I was crazy enough to swing from roof to roof on a line of drying wash which didn't even break. All the time I ran I could hear them behind me and I saw them once, when I turned, climbing behind me in a slow, deliberate way, as if they knew where I was going even though I did not. And I didn't; I had no more sense of direction up there than a—

Then I met one of them coming the other way.

I dove into the street—I say dove because I went nearly headlong, caught an awning, snapped it, swung, dropped into the street, ran around the corner, and following nothing but blind instinct, ran into a door—found it locked—swung up on a window-ledge, made the next highest window with a ledge six inches wide, clung there like a sleep-walker, with swimming head and shaking knees, and plummeted into the room inside all in a heap.

There was a girl in the room, braiding her hair.

I remember now—though I wasn't capable of connecting the two things then—that she must have been of the very highest class, for she was dressed in a long-sleeved, brocaded jacket that gleamed in the lamplight; she wore a silk shirt and had little bits of gold hung all over her: ankle bells, rings, earrings, bracelets, pins.

But all I saw then was a glow, a shimmer, and a tinkling of ornaments.

"Madam!" I gasped, "for Heaven's sake!" and she came over quite unhurriedly, to inspect me. She could not have been more than twelve years old. She had—how shall I say—a certain unpleasant expression, as if she were used to ordering people around, including her mamma and papa. She looked at me with great interest and then said:

"I do believe someone is chasing you. You must be very wicked."

"Beautiful lady," said I (with what voice I had left) "someone is indeed chasing me, although I assure your ladyship that I am not in the least wicked" (here I heaved a breath) "but only a poor, desperate, unfortunate, and terrified rascal, who throws himself both figura-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tively and literally at your ladyship's exquisite feet." Try talking that way when you can't breathe.

"You," said this little girl to me, "have charming black curly hair and very dreamy eyes, but I do think you entered my room rather ungallantly."

"Madam!" I said, throwing my arms about her knees, "fair one, beautiful lady, lovely one, if they catch me, they will kill me right here on your rug, so for Yup's sake, hide me!"

"That would be awful," she said, "because it would make a stain"—I am not making this up—and she took me by the hand and pulled me into a little alcove, shoving me behind some clothes. I heard her ankle-bells go leisurely from one side of the room to the other and then I heard her yawn and then—marvelous little actress!—she said, "Oh! Who are you?"

Well, they asked me about her and she described a horrible spirit who had looked into the window and then disappeared—"I prayed" she said—and they said Are you really telling the truth and she said How dare you and so on and so on—but a deadly cold faintness was coming over me; I would have given anything, even my life, for a chance to lie down, to lie down flat, and never never ever to get up again.

When I came to myself I was lying on the floor of the closet with my head in her lap and she was putting her hot little hands all over my face and neck to wake me up.

"Angel," I said. She smiled complacently.

"Ssssh," she said, "Lie still. They'll watch the roof for a while. I heard them say so. Here—" and she brought me pieces of sugar-candy and fed them to me and gave me something insipid to drink out of a little silver bottle. It tasted like the essence of all the oranges that ever weren't, but I needed it.

"I wish," I said quite sincerely, "that I could give you something. You've been so good to me."

"I have everything," she said, patting her hair.

"All the same—" I said, and I searched my pockets but they were as empty as my grave; "All the same, I wish—"

"Kiss my hand," she said, extending it and looking at me in what I can only describe as a very calculating manner. "I'm sure this is dreadfully wrong," she added contemplatively, "but as I'm to be married next week, I suppose it's all right." She smiled and a charming little dimple appeared on each side of her chin. "If you'd really like to show you're grateful," she said, "you may give me a gift, although it'll have to be something I can give back to you at the same time. Mamma watches me like a hawk."

I knew what she meant, so I said "May I—?" and she shut her eyes and I—what else?—kissed her. It's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the tradition, gentlemen. But it's not in the tradition that the lady shall fling her arms around you and hold onto you until you can't breathe, while you don't dare get free, for obvious reasons. Finally she let me go; apparently everything was perfectly proper as far as she was concerned.

"Remember me!" she whispered, waving a tiny, embroidered silk handkerchief as I climbed out the window, dreading the fall to the ground and broken bones. "Remember me!" "Angel!" I cried, "I shall never forget you!" and nearly dislocated my neck falling into the street.

I got myself up in one piece and searching my pockets, found a piece of candy. It hadn't occurred to her to give me money, I suppose. Though money was not much use in this town any more. There was a faint glow in the East and I could hear—very far away—some kind of noise. I walked slowly through the streets. By the time I got to the waterfront it was nearly dawn. I tell you, somehow the joy had gone out of it. I had no feeling at all. I found an old man smoking by the docks and begged some tobacco from him, which I wrapped in a piece of my shirt and put in my pocket.

"Tell me," I said, "did you see a big man come by here earlier tonight? A big, yellow-haired man with a boy?" He spat on the ground.

"I seen the whole town come by here," he said resentfully. "The whole damn lot. Screeching like water buf'loes." I was beginning to feel just how tired I was and my back and legs ached. "Tell me—" I said, but stopped in mid-sentence. What was the use? I sat down on the pier. I was too tired. I was just too tired.

Now I would have to steal a boat.

So I did. I mean I took it, that's all. They'd left only a child to guard the government house and I bribed him with my tobacco—none of them would look at money any more!—and besides, what did he care? He expected Utopia to dawn the next morning. The foreign ships were gone—so was ours—and so was everything else except a few planks with sails on them—they call them "butterflies," I believe. I took one of them and I was so tired that if there'd been any kind of weather at all, I would've just rolled off the plank into the sea. I felt queer, too, as if I'd been finished off or been sick; I don't know what it was. I got to our ship by the lights—oh, the blessed sound of black water against wood!—and hauled myself up; I would have fallen if they hadn't helped me.

"Is your scheme finished?" said my barbarian, sounding very grim and deep in the darkness.

"It is," said I, "and so am I, for that matter."

"Not quite," said he, "turn around," and when I did so, I saw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the whole Southern sky—from horizon to zenith—was a brilliant red. The city was on fire.

"Good God—" I said, "they must have—the torches—"

"Now that you have finished," said that barbarian, "can you tell us what you have brought back to us, out of that wreck?"

"I had some tobacco," I said. "No, I gave it away—and my gold chain—there's your money—but that's all—"

"We've spent it," said the boy. My friend squatted down beside me in the glow. The fire lit up the sea as far out as we were, and for the first time in my life I could clearly see the thoughts in those empty, Northern eyes. I have never liked those eyes, friend though he be.

"I have sailed with you since you were fifteen years old," he said, "but I tell you—"

"Why'd you do it?" whispered the boy in wonder.

"I tell you!" shouted Sam, "I tell you *never*! Never before!" He put his face up to mine.

"That town is burning," he said. "Everyone in it will be dead. Twice before I wondered: why does he do these things. But now I think I know."

"Tell me then," I said; "it'll be news to me," and it was at that moment, gentlemen, it was at that very moment that he pushed my face into the boards—I bear the marks of the splinters yet!—that he pushed, I say, my face into the boards and wrenching sideways, I saw that my old companion was about to put a knife in my neck and that our boy approved and stood by silently, his arms folded.

That was, fortunately, the exact moment in which you plucked me out of time (five thousand years into the future, if I'm to believe you) and deposited me in this shining kitchen.

It's not a kitchen? Well, a glorified kitchen, then, a transcendent kitchen!

And they wanted to kill me. Why? Did I *ask* those damned fools to burn their city? Did I ask them to be so stupid? If there'd been anyone there with the slightest sense, I couldn't have gotten one foot into that town! Not that I like the idea of my little preserver being burnt, or raped by the militia, or having her golden bells torn off her ankles; I'm not inhuman. Still—why should they kill me? It's their own fault for finding no decent work for me! If I have a—a force, a glory, something, call it what you like—inside me that must be satisfied, then let me satisfy it; let me make things happen, let me study things. If I could have studied stars, or clouds, or dirt, I would not have had to study men. If I had a place like this, now—!

Gentlemen, how can I believe you'll send me back? That would be murder. I've never murdered; I've only given people the power to choose one course of action or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another. Is it my fault that they always choose wrong?

Well, what about it? Remember, I've been here five days (if you count the first day when I did nothing but sleep)—I'm rested, well-fed, and much stronger than I was. Now I'll wrench myself free (much astounding Sam) and it'll be a hell-for-leather, round-the-mast, tooth-and-nail battle. They'll get me in the end, though, for there are two of them and only one of me and besides—I blush to confess it, gentlemen, it's most unbefitting an adventurer—I cannot swim.

So you will send me back? You've decided—like my friends—that I'm a devil? Not just a little cleverer than most, a little more clear-sighted than most, eh? A little more inclined to experiment with things? It's your decision. Chin up, stiff upper lip, we who are about to die—I hope your translator is finding the right equivalents. Too bad; I would so love to stay. But perhaps you believe that I'm not just cleverer than the people five thousand years ago, but a little more so than you, eh? Even here. Even now. A little closer to the power and the glory? That would be sad.

Better to send me back. With *that* little button. Oh yes, I watched you work it and fuss over it when I first came here; in fact, you took such care of it, I'd bet it's the only one you have.

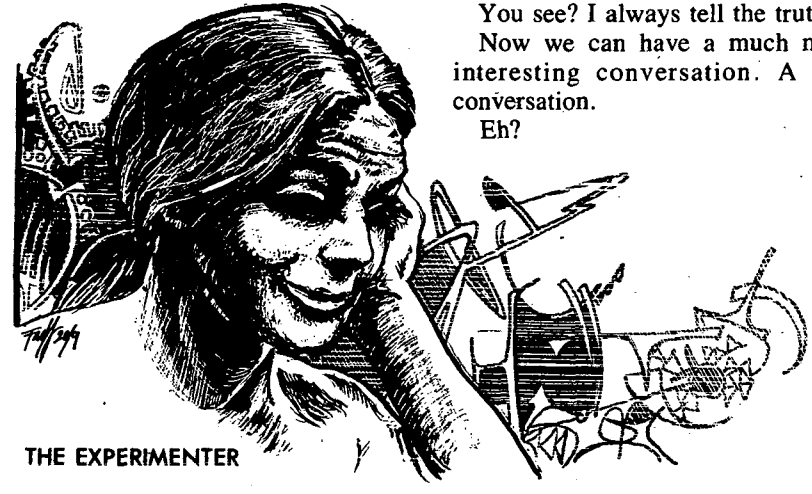
It would be a shame if some barbarian fool from the past gave its insides a general, quiet bashing when he first got here, when you left him alone because you thought he was so exhausted he could do nothing but sleep. He knew, you see, that it had brought him here, and he was damned if it was going to send him back. Don't be foolish; of course I didn't let it show on the outside.

Open the front panel and look.

You see? I always tell the truth.

Now we can have a much more interesting conversation. A real conversation.

Eh? ★



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FORUM

LOOKING AFT

HORACE L. GOLD

BEFORE I TELL you how I came to do what I did, I have to tell you how I affected the world from birth on.

I was born the year World War I started, graduated the year Roosevelt and Hitler came to power, got married the day World War II began, had a son 20 days after Pearl Harbor, founded *Galaxy* magazine just minutes ahead of the Korean War, got divorced the year of Sputnick, remarried the year of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

In other words, I'm an historical Typhoid Mary and should be paid a dollar by every man, woman and child on Earth—a lousy buck apiece—not to make any major moves any more.

While I'm waiting for that, let me tell you some lesser details of how I came to do what I did.

I discovered science-fiction when I was 13—a magazine with monstrous ants and a spastic man looking up at a girl in a bronze bra and filmy skirt being tenderly held in the mandibles of one of the bugs. It was beautiful, so beautiful that I decided right then to become an sf writer. As for not deciding to become an sf artist, how could a 13-year-old-kid—or anyone else, for that matter—compete with the peerless Frank R. Paul?

So I studied English and the sciences as hard as I could and wrote stories for the school magazines. After that, I wrote and wrote—thousands and thousands of words that—well, I'd walk to the post office to mail my stories and come back to find a rejection slip waiting for me at home. I never could figure out how the editors did that.

Then I started bringing manuscripts to the editors instead of mailing them. I got them back even faster that way. But I persevered—and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one day I brought a story to a wonderful old man named T. O'Connor Sloane. He got dangerously excited about it for a man of 82—but he said it was much too good for *Amazing Stories*. So he took it and me upstairs to the editor of the company's prestige magazine, the *Delineator*, and demanded that it be read. I got it back when I returned home. I think it arrived before I did. Next month, the *Delineator* folded. I immediately saw the connection but I wanted to sell that story and brought it back to Dr. Sloane. He maintained that it was too good for his magazine and refused to buy it.

So I never sold that story because *Amazing* was the only sf magazine at that time, and I lost the story somehow. I can't tell you if it was all that good, but maybe you can judge by what I remember of it. In it, I manfully exposed the miscreants who were exploiting the slave labor in the mines of Venus, and told of the revolt that freed the poor Earthlings.

Now if that story was too good for *Amazing*, maybe it accounted for the dreadful stories Dr. Sloane bought. But can you imagine what the rejects were like?

Well, I was 18 then and not too easily discouraged. I went on writing. My parents were vociferously against it. How, they wanted to know, could anyone make a living putting black marks on white paper? So I wrote and worked at any job I could find, and there weren't many, because this was at the bottom of the Great Depression. I remember being a busboy in a fancy place called Roadside Rest. I was interviewed by three Rumanian brothers, who owned it, and, though I didn't know it, I was hired because there was nobody else around. So I worked from 10 in the morning until 2 the next morning—and then had to walk home because the buses stopped running at midnight. It was a 7-mile walk and I was pooped. But I was there at 10 the next morning, ready to put in another 16-hour day. Did I mention that I worked for the waiters, seven of them, and each gave me a quarter, or a grand total of $1.75?

But the brothers were there already and I was told to come into the office, where they unanimously told me I couldn't work there any more.

But why, I asked. Because, they said, you are a writer, an artist, and we just couldn't stand the thought of a writer being a busboy.

But you're not paying me, I argued, the waiters are—and besides, I've never sold a story, so how can I be called a writer? They were Rumanianly adamant, though I begged, pleaded, cajoled. I went home in despair—and found a letter from someone named Desmond Hall awaiting me. It was on Street & Smith stationery—and it said that he was happy to inform me that my latest story had been accepted for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Astounding Stories! A check would be arriving soon!

I showed my parents the letter. They were unconvinced. After all, how much could a story bring? I didn't know. The letter didn't say, only that Mr. Hall was cutting 1500 words from it. I told my parents that brought the wordage to 19,500—and if they paid a cent a word, it would be $195, or $97.50 for half a cent. They scoffed. But the check arrived in a week or so—and it was for an astounding $195! I suddenly became a big man in my family's eyes, a 20-year old writer!

I went to meet Mr. Hall, who immediately put me on a first-name basis, and said he wanted to buy more material from me. So I moved from Far Rockaway, a seashore resort that was mobbed in the summer and abandoned in winter, a dismal place to live, to Greenwich Village, just ten minutes' walk from Street & Smith. It was wonderful. I sold half a dozen stories to Des in pretty short order. He told me it was impossible to make a living writing science fiction and urged me to diversify. But first, I didn't know how, and second, it was sf I wanted to write.

Meanwhile, my first story was published and appeared on the stands. More important than my being immortal for a month was that Hitler and Mussolini promptly launched an attack on the Rhineland and Ethiopia.

* * *

Now *Astounding* was nominally edited by F. Orlin Tremaine, but Des Hall was the actual editor. And one day Des was promoted to editor of *Mademoiselle*; he had won first prize for the name, though Tremaine became its first editor. Tremaine had done such a lousy job that Street & Smith put out a second Volume I, Number I. So Tremaine had been demoted and found himself with 3 million words to read for *Astounding* over a weekend. Instead of going through the manuscripts, however, he hurried to the Tombs to get an astrological reading from an imprisoned fortune teller named Evangeline Adams, the leading astrologist of the day. He had to wait while Wall Street men crowded into her cell. I don't know what she told him, but—here it gets a little complicated.

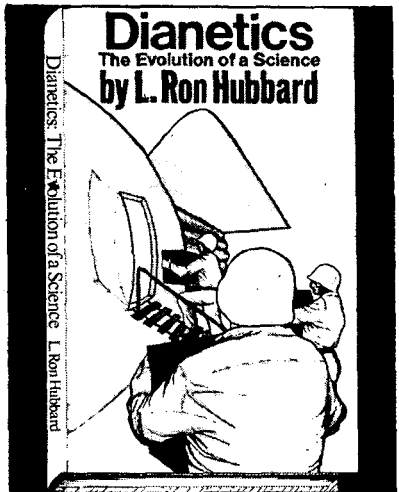
I was writing under the name of Clyde Crane Campbell. The other Campbell, Jown W. Jr., wasn't well enough known at the time to make it seem a less likely name for me. The Reason? Nazism's anti-Semitism had spread all through the world and it permeated Street & Smith, so I knew better than to write under my own name. When Des was promoted, he recommended me as his successor on *Astounding*. I was turned down because of my religion. If you think I was angry, you should have seen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and heard Des! And I never sold a word to Tremaine.

That's not entirely Tremaine's fault. I had run out of good sf ideas and he didn't know and cared even less how to get them out of me, as Hall had. So I became book reviewer for Mlle. at a fat $15 a month—and couldn't get review books from the publishers—they told me to come back when *Mademoiselle* was established! I consequently had to rewrite reviews from the New York *Times* and *Herald-Tribune*, which turned out to be a bad notion and my column was dropped. I wrote one story for Mlle., under the name of Julian Graey (I had tried Grey, then Gray, and finally combined them and sold one single story). It was a cockeyed comedy in the vein of the wild humor of the Thirties. And that was that.

I returned home when I had no choice. I sold shoes Saturdays for $4 a day and would have worked more had there been enough business to warrant it. Come summer, I became a professional drowner. The city was threatening to lay off lifeguards on stretches of beach that were officially safe—where nobody drowned or had to be rescued. So I would swim out beyond the ropes and thrash around until the guard on the beach saved me. I had to be carried to the nearest first-aid station and revived. Thinking up a new name and address for each drowning took some doing, but it



Increase Your Abilities and Self Confidence!

Order "Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science"

by L. Ron Hubbard

Read about the evolution of Dianetics, man's most advanced study of the mind. Find out how easily and effectively Dianetics can improve your confidence in yourself and your ability to accomplish your goals in life. Dianetics, as used by millions today, will work for YOU.

Just Buy, Read and Try *Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science.* (Handsomely bound, hard cover edition — 105 pages).

ORDER TODAY! Send $4.00 to: The Church of Scientology of California Dept. G-2, 2005 West 9th St. Los Angeles, California 90006.

SEND THIS COUPON!

Name . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

All orders will be shipped postage free within 24 hours of receipt.

"A Dianetics Publication. Dianetics is the trademark of L. Ron Hubbard in respect of his published works. Definition: Dianetics — from DIA Greek "through" and NOUS Greek "soul". Copyright © 1968, 1975 by L. Ron Hubbard. All rights reserved. Scientology is an applied religious philosophy. The Church of Scientology of California — a non-profit organization. Scientology® and Dianetics® are registered names.

If unavailable from the above address send to: The Church of Scientology of California, Publications Organization Dept G-2, 2723 West Temple St., Los Angeles, California 90026.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't that that ended my career. The last guard had dived to rescue me—and laid his head open on the catamaran and I had to pull him in. I couldn't go from hero to victim again, and that was the end of my easy $1.50 per drowning.

Three years passed, years of hunting for work, finding very little, and trying to write over my family's renewed objections. I can't blame them. It was terribly discouraging.

* * *

And then came John W Campbell, Jr., new editor of *Astounding*. I got a splendid letter from him about a story I had dispiritedly written and submitted. It was a lackluster creation about a man and dog getting their identities switched, and their attempts to get the villain, a surgeon, to switch them back again. The *real* problem, wrote Campbell, was communication—how could the man in the dog's body convey his predicament to someone who could help him? I spent two months on the story—but Campbell bought it, retitled it "A Matter of Form" and ran it as his first Nova story. It was disastrous financially, but it went over so well that I followed with the same reporter-detective hero in "Problem in Murder," the search for the mass murderer who left legs and arms in garbage cans every day but Sunday; the limbs turned out to have never been alive—yet, to satisfy the bullying police commissioner and the panicked public, a murderer had to be found. The hero took the last experiment, an almost but not quite complete body from the vat, dressed it, took it through the cordon in a hearse, wrote a suicide note for the corpse that had never lived, shot it, and the resulting scoop built up the commissioner for a shoo-in as governor.

Funny how awful an sf story sounds when condensed. I remember being backed into describing one at a party: "There are these giant brains in glassite domes in the Arctic, and they belong to aliens who know the entire history of the Earth because they're immortal—" The process was so embarrassing that I never did write that story.

I was shuffling through the rain one day toward Street & Smith without an idea in my head except a subvocal song about walking . . . No, wait a minute. I have to tell you how come I started writing under my own name. After my turndown for Des Hall's job, along came a man named Stanley G. Weinbaum, with the most marvelously invented yarns about the most lovable Martians and things that readers loved so much that S&S had to drop its anti-Semitism. John Campbell also put me on a first-name basis and told me to use my name, which I very thankfully did.

So, as I was saying, I was shuffling through the rain and there was this song I was subvocalizing about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walking between the raindrops . . . hey, how about that for a story! I had it half worked out by the time I reached John's office—only, after I hit him with it, he vetoed inverted ionization as the reason water wouldn't touch my hero. He wanted a pure fantasy with maybe a water gnome to put a curse on the protagonist. Now why would he want a fantasy when he's putting out an sf magazine? Well, that was his business, not mine. All right, a supernatural curse. But why? And how is it gotten rid of?

I wrote it, finally, as "Trouble With Water" and found myself famous. But why did Campbell want fantasy? Because he needed stories for his new magazine, *Unknown*, and I was in the first issue!

You can't imagine the impact *Unknown* had on writers. I, for one, dropped science fiction and joyfully turned out fantasies—nothing but fantasies—for the next two years. They included "Warm, Dark Places," "Day Off," and the biggest hit of all, a novel called "None But Lucifer."

Well, I finally wrote a short sf story in between fantasies and tried it out on John. He wanted fantasies from me. So I gave it to Mort Weisinger, editor of *Thrilling Wonder*. It was about the first man to land on Mars, such a complete heel and opportunist, wanting to turn his fame into money, that the equivalent of NASA fired him off to Mars again, to get rid of him. Mort, never one to leave well enough alone, wanted it turned into a tear-jerker, so I wrote a four-handkerchief story called, simply enough, "Hero." It was a stinker, a real bummer, but it sold—and it got Mort to sell me to the publisher of *Thrilling Stories* as Mort's assistant. My first editorial job! How about that?

I'll tell you how about that. It paid $30 a week, which wasn't quite enough to support a wife, and 20 days after Pearl Harbor, a child, and it was so mechanical that two years of it destroyed the pleasure of editing. I had come to it with the most exalted feeling of exaltation, and left it with style and pride completely gone.

I went next to setting up, as managing editor, a pair of true detective magazines, then resigned to write a million words a year for these and other such magazines. It got so I couldn't look another rape in the face. So I turned to comic books, writing as many as four scripts a week. Now THAT paid! And so did radio. I was on my way to the top—and I got drafted.

I spent a couple of years in the Pacific as a combat engineer, and when I got out, the markets were gone.

* * *

It was 1946, and I still had the same wife and son, and I couldn't get back to writing. So I had to find something else. It turned out to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exporting rebuilt bookbinding machinery. I knew as little about them as I had engineering, which was zero, except for pushing and pulling and hauling pieces of bridges together, and road grading—from the position of D-handle operator. I made a lot of money in the bookbinding business before it dried up.

By that time, I was ready to go back to writing. But what? *Unknown* had folded, and I didn't want to go back to sf for the very reason Des Hall had spelled out—it was too much work for too little dough. So I turned again to the comic books and soon worked my way up to the highest-paid writer in the field—and collapsed. I did, not the field.

I was doing my best to recover when a girl who had worked for me called me in to present a publishing program to a French-Italian publishing firm, named, in translation, World Editions.

It seems they had a big slick magazine in France and Italy that was selling two or three million copies a week. A cross between beautifully executed comics and confession stories, less beautifully executed, it was dubbed *Fascination* and set loose on the American public with a huge advertising program. There were five issues—the last sold 5% of its print order of several hundred thousand, or was it a million? I forget. Anyhow, they were too stubborn to get out of the American market with such a beating, and so I was asked to submit a publishing program.

I surveyed the entire magazine market. It was early 1950, and everywhere I looked, magazines were in deep trouble. As soon as paper rationing had ended in 1946, everyone who could read—or could hire someone to read—was putting out everything from comics to fashion magazines. The one exception was science fiction.

On the basis of experience, I should have submitted anything but an sf magazine, a fantasy magazine projected for later, once the sf one was established, and a series of paperback sf novels. But I saw that *Astounding* was going off into one cult after another—John Campbell was rushing up dead ends, the latest being Dianetics, in his search for a meaningful universe—and *Fantasy & Science Fiction* was brand new, and flying in the face of the single immutable law of those fields: that readers don't like fantasy in their sf, or sf in their fantasy. A very high-grade sf magazine could fit right between them. And thus I offered my publishing program to the Italian representative of World Editions, a great guy named Lombi. He offered it to the publisher who lived on the Riviera, who must have flipped a coin, because neither he nor Lombi knew anything at all about sf or fantasy, and it came up yes.

I gave them a choice between *Galaxy* and *If*. I liked both titles,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but I left the decision to Lombi and his boss on the Riviera. They, in turn, didn't know what a "galaxy" was, and *If* seemed to them too short, and they left the choice to me. So I and our art director, Washington Irving van der Poel (Van for short), talked over possible cover layouts—and my present wife's (Nicky's) first husband, a great calligrapher, designed the lettering. Harry Harrison lent us his apartment to display the many variations of both *Galaxy* and *If*, which a large number of people, including writers, artists, and readers, were asked to vote on.

Curiously, almost all wrote on their secret ballots that they personally liked *Galaxy* and an inverted-L layout, but each thought nobody else would. That was good enough for us—*Galaxy* it was and the inverted-L layout won. So did Crome-Kote, the closest printing paper to photographic glossies, which I had asked for pretty urgently for our cover stock. Despite its high cost and difficulty of handling, I got what I asked for.

The fact is that I got every single thing I wanted, from word rates to rights. The going rate was a top of two cents a word—I got the price up to three cents minimum, four cents or more for steady contributors, plus $100 for short-shorts. And we bought first-serial rights only.

Suddenly, writers and artists offered us everything they were turning out, and many of the greats came out of retirement to join us. It was a wonderful time to be alive and editing *Galaxy*. And in the unbelievable space of five issues, *Galaxy* was in the black!

— ★★★

Just in case you think I'm paranoid about being an historical Typhoid Mary, consider this—only months after *Galaxy* was born, the Korean War started.

And paper became impossible to buy at any price. Our printer had set us up with a mill—or so we thought. It turned out he had the contract, not us, and we were forced to look elsewhere. I went through the yellow pages and called every printer I found, asking if we could hook up with them. The only one who said yes was a printing broker named Robert M. Guinn, who had followed *Galaxy*'s astonishing rise toward first place with considerable awe.

The paper was more like a blotter than newsprint, but we missed only one issue in switching printers. And we came to be great friends with Bob Guinn, of which more later.

Now back to Lombi. He was in the U.S. on a visitor's visa, not allowed to work here or be paid by *Galaxy*. One day he was called down to Washington by the Immigration Department and shown all of a letter but the signature—which stated that he was a dirty Italian communistic fascist who ought to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be sent back where he came from. Affidavits and appeals failed. He was sent back to Italy, his visa withdrawn.

I still don't know who sent that letter, but it's no coincidence that as soon as Lombi was out of the country, internal warfare developed between the American, French and Italian offices of World Editions. We had an ex-music publisher as president of the American office, who had been hired just as he was about to lock his door and declare bankruptcy, and a circulation director. I had told Lombi at the outset to call in all unsold copies of *Galaxy*'s first year—and the president and the circulation manager got hold of them and stuffed their garages with these soon-to-be-priceless copies of the magazine. Then strange things happened to our sales. Readers wrote in that they couldn't find us on any newsstand anywhere.

The upshot was that the Riviera guy sent the head of the French office to New York to find out what went wrong. To make a short story of all this, the Frenchman cabled back to the Riviera that the magazine was a dud and should immediately be sold—to the American president and the circulation director, and their price was $3,000. I got in touch hurriedly with Lombi and told him of this. The time in Rome was 4:30 a.m., but Lombi got up and raced to the Riviera. The publisher instantly sent a cable stopping negotiations and followed up with another visit by Lombi to take care of the matter.

I was told by the two American scoundrels that I was part of the deal, but I wasn't having any. Lombi arrived by plane and we began looking for a better buyer. A number of outfits here were interested, but, as I said, we were becoming great friends with the printing broker, Bob Guinn, and I got him to make a bid. I don't know how much, but Lombi made the sale with the Riviera man's blessing—and no sooner had Guinn bought it than the inside job became clear to Lombi. The distribution pattern had been deliberately loused up—by shipping *Galaxy* all over the South, where there was practically nobody interested in sf, and into hamlets all over the North and West.

Lombi called his boss and told him of this sabotage, and the boss told Lombi to buy back the magazine from Guinn. Guinn gave him his price. Lombi was aghast—but this is four times as much as you paid! Guinn grinned and told him he, Guinn, knew what he was buying, whereas World Editions hadn't known what they were selling. Lombi went home, but not in dishonor. I hated to see him go. We'd had a fine relationship.

But Bob Guinn was equally good to work for. He left policy decisions and rates up to me, and involved me in distribution and advertising problems. I mention advertising because once World Editions

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had, over my protests, run a back cover ad for a book called "Confessions of a French Chambermaid" and we'd lost 10,000 readers for the three months of the contract. *Galaxy* went to the top of the field after that, never to lose ground.

And then came *Beyond Fantasy Fiction*. It was beautiful—for ten wonderful issues. By then we had learned that there just wasn't a big enough audience to support a fantasy magazine, so it died just as *Unknown* had, a decade before, of financial malnutrition. If *Beyond* had come first, I think it would have had the same effect and same misty memories as *Unknown*.

After we had vacated the title *If* in 1950, Jim Quinn put it out, but couldn't keep it going. And so I got both titles to edit. This was more than an extra job for me—it enabled me to buy stories that weren't *Galaxy* standard and thus keep writers happy, as well as giving me the chance I'd never before had of bringing new ones up to *Galaxy*.

As for the *Galaxy* sf novel reprints—they weren't handled right as packages, being more like numbered magazines than paperbacks. I got that go-ahead just as the paperback market broke, but it was too late.

All this was from 1950 to 1961, eleven memorable years. What happened to me then? I had been in a disastrous car crash that finally wore me down to 126 pounds and eventually into the hospital with a poor chance of my ever being able to walk again. I was there for a long time, till my weight was back to normal and the crippling cured.

So, if you remember, I remarried—and the big buildup came to South Vietnam. Then I bought my very first house—and the Six Day War happened.

* * *

You know, things like that sober a guy. It's only part of the reason I would never go back to editing magazines again. The other part is that you have to be 25 years younger than I am now, with enough enthusiasm to get excited over a fresh idea, a fine bit of characterization, a new view of something old—and the vigor to push and pull until you and a writer and a story all click.

Jim Baen has all that. *Galaxy* is safe in his hands, and solidly established enough, and fresh and refreshing enough, to endure at least another quarter of a century, whoever runs it.

No, I wouldn't take a million cruzeiros for the memories I have of the writers and readers and great stories I encountered in those eleven years I served. That took some doing. And nothing could induce me to do it again.

It wouldn't be safe for the world, would it?

Meanwhile, happy 25th anniversary, *Galaxy*!

And long life to you! ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE END RESULT

W. S. DOXEY

LICENSED TO LNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The one irremediable flaw is—perfection!

FROM WHERE HE LAY in the hammock on the porch Munro could take in a goodly portion of the universe without so much as having to raise his head. Simply by opening one eye he could see down the hill to the ocean and across the waves to the horizon. From that point it was only a matter of shifting his gaze upward a degree or two to observe a broad expanse of velvet sky decorated with innumerable stars. Although he was used to seeing this brilliant spectacle every night, he seemed always to have the same impression: in a dark room he peered down at a dark cloth, when suddenly a merchant dashed a handful of blazing diamonds onto the velvet.

Munro lazily opened one eye. Yes, the night fitted that description very well. And even now one star was tumbling, as it were, across the velvet sky in an exciting arc.

He sat up. Was it going to land in the sea?

The falling light was eclipsed by a palm.

Munro rubbed his eyes. "Must've been dreaming," he declared, glancing at the luminous dial of his watch.

Ten.

Early yet.

He yawned. Could still put in several hours work. He swung his bare feet to the matted floor. Work was what he had isolated himself on this island in the south Pacific for.

He stood, stretched. Funny how even the best laid plans went astray. It was one thing to decide a tropical isle cut off from the world was the right place to work. Easy to make such a decision when you were sitting in a stuffy office in Cambridge looking out through a dirty window at snow turned yellow-gray by industrial smoke.

So you make the arrangements, cut the redtape, inform the Department. Their reaction was so intense you would've thought you were a mass murderer making a successful escape.

Of course, they were justified. Be a shame if they lost the first man who had been to Mars and lived to tell about it. And so a compromise was worked out. You gave them ten days—two hundred and forty hours—of your life. They pumped you full of bug-juice, and pumped it out again in the form of answers to their questions. The process was painless. You slept like the dead through it all and awoke, finally, feeling as though a burden had been removed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He gave them enough data to keep the entire staff busy for years. Then, with the Department's blessing, he made his journey via navy plane and ship to Boratonga. Others in the program had been here before him, men from the moon missions, and even Craig, the captain who circled Venus and later went mad and killed himself.

The government owned the island and maintained it in its timeless natural form. The houses were made by the native population of bamboo and palm thatch. There was no electricity, no running water. You worked by sunlight or lamplight, and you bathed either in the sea or in the icy stream flowing from the hills.

Munro looked back one last time at the ocean and the night sky, then went inside and lit the lamp on his work table. The sheet of paper in the portable typewriter nagged him to get back to work. He glanced at the paragraph he'd been writing. Had broken off in mid-sentence when Luana called him to eat. Subject was his reaction to the desolate Martian landscape.

Munro drew a deep breath and tasted the fragrant tropical air. Up there on the Red Planet the only taste was mechanical. Man wasn't made for blandness. Why, even the Eskimo delighted in odor, in color, in feeling.

Munro heard a rustling behind him. Without turning he said, "Luana?"

A soft voice replied, "Moon rise. You come and we go swim in lagoon. You like?"

Munro liked very much. He tore the page from the typewriter and tossed it in the crate serving as waste basket. Tomorrow was soon enough to deal with Martian impressions. He blew out the lamp and followed the native girl down the path through the hibiscus and jasmine. The wind in the palm sounded like rain, but the night was clear and the moon was above the horizon.

The only reminder of civilization was the occasional sad baying of a dog in the village a half mile away.

* * *

Rays of sun. Stars. The moon, green and red.

Munro blinked. The morning sunlight streamed through the trees and fell slanting through the window beside the mat upon which he and Luana slept. The rays, stars, and moon he fancied he saw were familiar objects—a spider and its web, festooned with sparkling droplets of dew.

Munro reached out and touched the sleeping Luana's hair—then looked back at the window opening again. There was another spider and web in the upper left portion. The spiders were identically marked in red and green.

Nothing uncommon about that. Creatures of the same species looked alike. Be strange if they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't. Only it was the first time Munro remembered seeing two working webs in the same window.

Luana rose, and they bathed in the cold stream. Afterward she prepared something to eat while Munro looked over the pages he had been working on the day before.

Not much had been accomplished. He wondered if the bug-juice had dulled his memory by exposing all his factual knowledge. What he was searching after now was his human response to the Mars voyage, his feelings, his joys and fears.

"The colors are muted," he read, "reminiscent of nothing so much perhaps as the beginning riff of a sax-man in a smoky nightclub."

Well, that wasn't too bad. In fact, the Martian landscape was that way, to him at least. Like a sad song, like the blues, like something full and bursting was buried just below the grim surface.

Luana's big yellow cat brushed against Munro's bare leg. He absently spoke to the friendly creature, then bent and stroked its blunt head. And when he looked up from the page he noticed another cat—big and yellow, marked identically—resting atop the reference books stacked on a mat in the corner.

One cat was almost one too many. "Luana!" he called. "Come here."

"Yes?" She came in carrying a platter of colorful fruits.

"The cat, Ilo, you didn't say he had a brother."

She glanced at the cat in the corner. "I did not know." She smiled. "But Ilo is one big fellow who love all over Boratonga. He has many sons."

"Just like him?" Munro wondered. "But never mind. Shoo that fellow out. One cat is plenty."

"Okay, then we eat, and then we go beach side? Nice morning."

"No, you go beach side. Me, I've got to work."

"Always work, work, work." She took a red flower from atop the fruit and placed it behind her ear. Then took another, a yellow hibiscus, and stuck it in the front of Munro's shirt.

"Now you pretty, me pretty, fruit pretty, everything pretty—cat gone. We eat, okay?"

* * *

They ate. And the morning was so fresh and lovely that Munro decided surely an hour more or less wouldn't matter. So they went to the beach. As they came out of the house and passed the window, he noticed that one of the spiders was missing. Web and all. A bird no doubt had swooped down and had his breakfast.

What was one spider in the scheme of things, anyhow?

The clear blue water took his mind off of life and death. For a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAW-sf BOOKS

Donald A. Wollheim, Publisher

FIRST TIME PAPERBACKS

THE HERITAGE OF HASTUR by Marion Zimmer Bradley is the key book of the *Darkover* epic. A packed 384 pages, plot within plot, science interlocked with mentalism, human entwined with Darkovan, it is Bradley's greatest!
(UW1189 - $1.50)

THE STAR-CROWNED KINGS by Robert Chilson brings this new writer back with a surprising novel: a galaxy in which a few men of extraordinary mutant powers dominate, and what happens when one came among them who would not obey their rules. *(UY1190 - $1.25)*

BLADESMAN OF ANTARES by Alan Burt Akers is the ninth adventure of Dray Prescot on the wonder world of Kregen. The SCORPIO and ANTARES Prescot novels steadily win new readers. With cover and interior illustrations by Jack Gaughan. *(UY1188 - $1.25)*

And there is a new printing of THE SUNS OF SCORPIO, telling of Prescot's adventures in the Inner Sea. If you haven't read it, don't miss it! (We will have WARRIOR OF SCORPIO, the first one to go out of print, back in December.)
(UY1191 - $1.25)

Plus Gordon R. Dickson's SLEEPWALKER'S WORLD, the novel which was called "one of the hundred best of the year" by *The New York Times*. *(UY1192 - $1.25)*

Send 20¢ in stamps for our new catalog and order forms to:

DAW Books, Inc.
28th Fl.
1301 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10019

time he and Luana drifted on the waves and dove down to the bottom to bring up colorful shells. Then they swam through clouds of bright fish to the shore, shook the water from their skin, found their garments, and started back to the house.

Tomi, the ancient gray dog that prowled the beach for dead fish, trailed them, and behind him several feet, moving like his thin shadow, was a second Tomi.

Luana noticed the similarity. "There are two of Tomi, yes?"

Munroe examined the two animals. They were indeed identical.

Munro held out his hand and made a friendly kissing sound with his lips. Tomi waddled forward. The second dog moved too. Munro stopped, found a small coconut, and flung it at Tomi's twin. It struck him on the head, but the dog did not move.

Tomi barked and the other dog backed off into the jungle.

"This island have many dogs," said Luana. "Tomi old like Ilo." She giggled.

Munro smiled but he did not laugh. When he returned to the hut he checked the window very carefully and was surprised to discover no trace at all of spider web in the corner where the second spider had been.

He pondered this fact. Luana left him and went into the village to buy coffee and sugar at the small store. Munro perched on the upturned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crate he used as a chair when he typed and tried to focus his thoughts on the Martian landscape.

"From the sky above," he began, "there is a promise you can almost taste, a hint of things strawberry, cool, delicious. But when you step out into that faint atmosphere, your head spins and you fear there is something wrong with your breathing equipment. But no, it functions. The fault is within yourself. It is found—."

His fingers hesitated, stopped on the cool keys.

Found where?

Munro yanked the sheet from the machine and crumpled it in a ball. He strode to the window. The sun was almost overhead. Luana was coming back.

"That was a quick trip," he muttered.

He watched her lilting gait, the way the sunlight shone in her jet hair.

Her arms were empty. Strange? Where were the packages? The store wasn't closed, never was. If owner Adams weren't in, you took what you needed and settled up later.

She saw him. He smiled. She came several paces nearer, then quickly turned off into the jungle and was gone.

"Now what?" Munro wondered.

Some sort of game? She was childlike, but he couldn't stop every five minutes and play!

Then he felt her presence behind

DAW sf BOOKS

Donald A. Wollheim, Publisher

FIRST TIME PAPERBACKS

Fritz has compiled a new collection for his many fans: THE SECOND BOOK OF FRITZ LEIBER, his best in all directions including some new tales and much that his most ardent admirers will find special!
(UY1195 - $1.25)

TOTAL ECLIPSE by John Brunner is his space novel of the year—the exploration of a planet of Sigma Draconis whose vanished civilization carries a life-and-death meaning for Earthly humanity. Chris Foss did a marvelous cover!
(UY1193 - $1.25)

For E. C. Tubb's Dumarest fans: EYE OF THE ZODIAC. Solid space adventure as Earl Dumarest reaches the outskirts of our Terrestrial constellations . . .
(UY1194 - $1.25)

John Jakes hilarious takeoff on Conan: MENTION MY NAME IN ATLANTIS (Oh, for a movie with Zero Mostel!) is back with a wow of a cover by Michael Whelan.
(UY1196 - $1.25)

Keeping John Brunner in print is not easy for this Hugo-winner has a following that grows steadily. Here is his very popular novel THE STARDROPPERS, with the Kelly Freas cover of the month!
(UY1197 - $1.25)

Don't forget to send for our new catalog!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him. Her hands touched him. "Me come back quick," she whispered. "You glad?"

They sank to the mat. Yes, he was glad.

But he was also practical. The coffee, the sugar?

She didn't answer.

* * *

Later, as the afternoon shadows filtered through the hut, Luana rose and darted down the path. Munro had just settled himself before the typewriter when she reappeared carrying several packages. She was singing an island song. Her happy voice called him out to meet her.

"Adams, him send you this," she said, giving him a cigar. "He say you smoke and be happy. No work too much. Be pretty, be happy! We go swim, yes?"

Munro took the packages and followed her to the porch. What the devil, the day was shot anyhow! "Yes, we go swim," he replied.

* * *

The lamp flickered as he moved the chimney and lit the cigar from the naked flame. Blue smoke diffused the pale yellow light and a trapped bug flew to his death when the glass dropped once again into place.

Munro blew a ring of smoke. Luana clapped at his skill. He smiled and looked up at the sky. Same as the night before, and the night before that. Stars, planets, space. Soon the moon would crawl above the horizon. Mars was out there, too, glistening, red.

Ilo came in from the jungle and leaped into Luana's lap. She stroked his tawny fur. He curled up and purred himself to sleep. Tomi the dog came out of the shadows and found a place for the night by the edge of the proch.

All was peaceful, quiet, on this tiny island world.

And yet—.

Munro puffed his cigar till the coal glowed like an angry eye and a layer of blue floated between him and the stars.

The loose flesh on the back of his neck tingled. His scalp seemed to draw up slightly.

He had a feeling—there was no other way to explain—that something beyond the lamplight in the shadows of the jungle was observing him.

He held the lamp above his head and searched the increased circle of light. A pair of tropical birds roosting on a nearby branch blinked their huge eyes—at least Munro was certain one of the pair blinked. The other turned away from the light.

* * *

He slept restlessly. Towards dawn Luana woke and whispered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that today she must visit her mother's hut which stood a mile on the other side of the village. Munro grunted and tried sleep again. He thought of his journey across space to Mars, of the days spent there in the sterile habitat, of the Martian miles he had explored, setting his foot where no earthling had trod, of the poetic spectacle of those two moons rising and setting in the thin atmosphere.

For a time he napped. Then he woke and remained awake. His work waited on the table by the typewriter. Luana was gone and would not return before afternoon. He could get a lot done.

Yes, but first.

She had left a pot of coffee on the tiny stove. There was a tray of fresh fruit. Munro had a light breakfast and then went down to the sea for his morning dip. Tomi was there looking for his breakfast. His companion of the day before was nowhere to be seen.

Munro gave the old dog an affectionate pat and plunged into the cool water. Clouds of red and yellow fish rose round about him and pecked gently at his skin.

He swam, he lazed, and then he came out, flung the water from his body best he could, slipped on his shorts, and went back to the hut, with every good intention of at last getting down to some real work.

Yes, he would wrap this thing up. After all, what was so complicated about what he had to say? So he was the only human—thus far—to visit another planet and survive. That in itself was no reason to suppose his emotional reactions would be any different from another person's. Every human had pretty much the same basic response mechanism; the real difference was probably of degree. Poets looked for one sort of thing, engineers another.

Munro laughed. "And everyone seems to find what he looks for!"

This bit of native wisdom almost caused him to laugh again. But at that moment he heard a sound. It came from the direction of his hut. He stopped, cupped his hand behind his ear to be sure. Some of the birds were cunning mimics.

No, this sound was authentic. It was the steady click-click of a typewriter.

Luana couldn't type; besides, she was gone.

Someone from the Department must've come during the night. Yes, and they were working up one report or another, using his machine. That meant they'd probably seen the pages he'd written.

"Damn!" cried Munro. That was like reading another's mail!

Well, he'd put a quick stop to it!

He ran up the path to the porch, then slowed and edged through the door.

A man sat on the upturned crate before the typewriter. His fingers flew over the keys, but there was no paper in the machine.

"Hi," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was something about the fellow, about the slope of his shoulders, the color of his hair.

He stopped typing and turned round. There was a wry smile on his tanned face.

Munro's heart raced. The man was *Munro*!

"I've been waiting. Don't be alarmed."

"Who are you?" Munro finally managed to ask.

"Why, you, of course," came the laughing response. "No, not really. Sit down. You look as though you might faint."

Munro sat on the mat flooring. He blinked and passed his hands before his eyes, but when he looked again the stranger was still there.

"Sorry to have frightened you," his doppleganger continued. "You are in no danger."

Munro forced himself to be objective, rational. Apparently, the shape before him did exist. Very well, get to the bottom of the mystery.

He said, "Unless I'm hallucinating, this is real. You *are* my twin. You—."

Twin? What about the spiders, cats, dogs,—even Luana. . . ?

"I cannot know your thoughts directly," said the stranger. "However, I can read them in your expression."

"You can assume any shape?"

"Yes. I was the other spider, the other Ilo and Tomi." He grinned. "Luana, also."

Munro felt color rise in his face.

"Don't be embarrassed," said the stranger. "Your actions were natural, quite in keeping with your species."

"Yes, but there is such a thing as privacy!"

"Not necessarily. Didn't you examine everything that came your way on Mars?"

"Yes, but that was scientific. My mission was to—."

Munro stopped in mid-sentence. Was this protean form telling him he too was on a scientific mission?

"There is a parallel to our situations. I too travel and observe, though for no ultimate purpose, at least none of which I am aware. Where I go I take on the form of the various living things I encounter. Their strengths are mine, and their limitations."

"That's why you started here as a spider?"

"Yes, but actually I commenced much smaller. As I observed I discovered varying levels of intelligence. In order to communicate with you I had to become you." He gestured to the reference books in the corner. "I scanned those also."

"How?" asked Munro. "I was gone less than an hour."

"The answer is in one of those volumes. Time is relative. A moment for you may be an eon for me."

"Yes, but *how* do you change shapes?"

The stranger frowned. "Now we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come to the crux of our problem. There are facts which I cannot explain to you because you cannot understand. You see, your species hasn't yet reached a level to comprehend. Our conversation is, therefore, limited. But to give you a hint—your geneticists are working with a duplicating process they call cloning. Cloning is analogous to the method I use."

"All right," said Munro, choking down an urge to yell, perhaps even to leap up and punch this whatever-it-was in the nose to see if it were real. "Can you tell me where you're from, what you are?"

"My origin is the same as yours, the universe. As with you, the matter which is me has always been. But my—home—is far away, and my existence-span is quite beyond your grasp. I do not know if it is possible for me to experience an ultimate end, or 'death,' to use your vocabulary.

"Who am I? Again, the great differences between our states makes an answer almost impossible. In one of your books a theory of evolution is set forth. Working within that framework, I am the end result."

Munro came to his feet. "The end result? You? A shapeless something? Is this—" he waved his arms about, pointed out the window at the brilliant flowering trees "—all this bound to come to your state?"

"Yes. But why be so upset? Being, as you say, Shape-*less*, I have all shapes. You have been across a narrow stream to a nearby planet. I have spanned oceans, galaxies."

"Yes, but why? Tell me why?"

The stranger smiled and shook his head. "The answer to that question exists beyond the limits of my understanding, if it exists."

"But why are you here, speaking to me?" Munro demanded.

"Why not?"

Suddenly Munro's frustration overwhelmed him. He leaped up and rushed the stranger, who sidestepped him and jumped out the window.

"That's rather foolish," he said.

"We'll see about that when I catch you!" snarled Munro, jumping through the same window.

The stranger ran backwards down the path, laughing.

Munro, more enraged than ever, pursued, and as he came near and reached out to grab him, a passing red and green butterfly suddenly became two butterflies, and Munro's fingers captured empty air.

The two insects flew off in different directions.

Which was which?

He watched them vanish into the jungle, then, after a while, turned and walked back to the hut.

There was nothing left for him to do except try again to get back to work—and he would do just that, after a cup of coffee and a quick swim. Procrastination was part of the human condition. He found himself smiling. It was rather nice not to be perfect, yet. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BUT LOYAL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TO HIS OWN

DAVID DRAKE

In war, life is cheap—but betrayal can be *very* expensive!

"IT JUST BLEW UP. Hammer and his men knew but they didn't say a thing," blurted the young captain as he looked past Secretary Tromp, his gaze compelled toward the milky noonday sky. It was not the sky of Frieland and that bothered Captain Stilchey almost as much as his near-death in the ambush an hour before. "He's insane! They all are."

"Others have said so," the councillor stated with the heavy ambiguity of an oracle replying to an ill-phrased question. Tromp's height was short of two meters by less than a hand's breadth, and he was broad in proportion. That size and the generally dull look on his face caused some visitors looking for Frieland's highest civil servant to believe they had surprised a retired

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policeman of some sort sitting at the desk of the Secretary to the Council of State.

Tromp did not always disabuse them.

Now his great left hand expanded over the grizzled fringe of hair remaining at the base of his skull. "Tell me about the ambush," he directed.

"He didn't make any trouble about coming to you here at the port," Stilchey said, for a moment watching his fingers writhe together rather than look at his superior . He glanced up. "Have you met Hammer?"

"No, I kept in the background when plans for the Auxilliary Regiment were drafted. I've seen his picture, of course."

"Not the same," the captain replied, beginning to talk very quickly. "He's not big but he, he moves, he's alive and it's like every time he speaks he's training a gun on you, waiting for you to slip. But he came along, no trouble—only he said we'd go with a platoon of combat cars instead of flying back, he wanted to check road security between Southport and the firebase where we were. I said sure, a couple hours wasn't crucial. . . ."

Tromp nodded. "Well done," he said. "Hammer's cooperation is very important if this . . . business is to be concluded smoothly. And,"—here the councillor's face hardened without any noticeable shift of muscles—"the last thing we wanted was for the good colonel to become concerned while he was still with his troops. He is not a stupid man."

Gratification played about the edges of Stilchey's mouth, but the conversation had cycled the captain's mind back closer to the blast of cyan fire. His stomach began to spin. "There were about fifteen vehicles in the patrol, all but the second one open combat cars. That was a command car, same chassis and ground-effect curtain, but enclosed, you see? Better commo gear and an air-conditioned passenger compartment. I started toward it but Hammer said, no, I was to get in the next one with him and Joachim."

Stilchey coughed, halted. "That Joachim's here with him now; he calls him his aide. The bastard's queer, he tried to make me when I flew out. . . ."

Puzzlement. "Colonel Hammer is homosexual, Captain? Or his aide, or. . . ?"

"No, Via! Him, not the—I don't know. Via, maybe him too. The bastard scares me, he really does."

To statesmen patience is a tool; it is a palpable thing that can grind necessary information out of a young man whose aristocratic lineage and sparkling uniform have suddenly ceased to armor him against the universe. The ambush, Captain." Tromp pressed stolidly.

With a visible effort, Stilchey regained the thread of his narrative.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Joachim drove. Hammer and I were in the back along with a noncom from Curwin—Worzer, his name was. He and Joachim threw dice for who had to drive. The road was supposed to be clear but Hammer made me put on body armor. I thought it was cop, you know—make the staffer get hot and dusty.

"Via," he swore again, but softly this time. "I was at the leftside powergun but I wasn't paying much attention; nothing really to pay attention to. Hammer was on the radio a lot, but my helmet only had intercom so I didn't know what he was saying. The road was stabilized earth, just a gray line through hectares of those funny blue plants you see all over here, the ones with the fat leaves."

"Bluebrights," the older man said dryly. "Melpomone's only export; as you would know from the briefing cubes you were issued in transit, I should think."

"Would the Lord I'd never *heard* of this damned place!" Stilchey blazed back. His family controlled Karob Trading; no civil servant—not even Tromp, the Gray Eminence behind the Congress of the Republic—could cow him. But he was a soldier, too, and after a moment he continued, "Bluebrights in rows, waist high and ugly, and beyond that nothing but the soil blowing away as we passed.

"We were half an hour out from the firebase, maybe half the way to here. The ground was dimpled with frost heaves. A little copse was in sight ahead of us, trees ten, fifteen meters high. Hammer had the forward gun, and on the intercom he said, 'Want to double the bet, Blackie?' Then they armed their guns—I didn't know why—and Worzer said, 'I still think they'll be in the draw two kays south, but I won't take any more of your money.' They were laughing and I thought they were going to just . . . clear the guns, you know?"

The captain closed his eyes. He remembered how they had stared at him, two bulging circles and the hollow of his screaming mouth below them, reflected on the polished floorplate of the combat car. "The command car blew up just as we entered the trees. There was a flash like the sun and it *ate* the back half of the car, armor and all. The front flipped over and over into the trees, and the air *stank* with metal. Joachim laid us sideways to follow the part the mine had left, cutting in right behind when it hit a tree and stopped. The driver raised his head out of the hatch and maybe he could have got clear himself . . . but Hammer jumped off our deck to his and jerked him out, yanked him up in his armor as small as he is. Then they were back in our car. They were firing, everybody was firing, and we turned right, into the trees, into the guns."

"There were Mel troops in the grove, then?" Tromp asked.

"Must have been," Stilchey re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plied. He looked straight at the older man and said, very simply, "I was behind the bulkhead. Maybe if I'd known what to expect. . . .The other driver was at my gun, they didn't need me." Stilchey swallowed once, continued, "Some shots hit on my side. They didn't come through, but they made the whole car ring. The empties kept spattering me and the car was bouncing, jumping downed trees. Everything seemed to be on fire. We cleared the grove into another field of bluebrights. Shells from the firebase were already landing in the trees; the place was targeted. And Worzer pulled off his helmet and he spat and said, 'Cold meat, Colonel, you couldn't a called it better.' Via!"

"Well, it does sound like they reacted well to the ambush," Tromp admitted, puzzled because nothing Stilchey had told him explained the captain's fear and hatred of Hammer and his men.

"Nice extempore response, hey?" the aide suggested with bitter irony. "Only Hammer, seeing I didn't know what Worzer meant, turned to me, and said, 'We let the Mels get word that me and Secretary Tromp would take a convoy to Southport this morning. They still had fifty or so regulars here in Region 4 claiming to be an infantry battalion, and it looked like a good time to flush them for good and all.' "

Tromp said nothing. He spread his hands carefully on the citron-yellow of his desk top and seemed to be fixedly studying the contrast. Stilchey waited for a response. At last he said, "I don't like being used for bait, Secretary. "And what if you'd decided to go out to the firebase yourself? I was all right for a stand-in, but do you think Hammer would have cared if you were there in person? He won't let anything stand in his way."

"Colonel Hammer does seem to have some unconventional attitudes," Tromp agreed. A bleak smile edged his voice as he continued, "But at that, it's rather fortunate that he brought a platoon in with him. We can begin the demobilization of his vaunted Slammers with them."

* * *

The dome of the Starport Lounge capped Southport's hundred-meter hotel tower. Its vitril panels were seamless and of the same refractive index as the atmosphere. As a tactician, Hammer was fascinated with the view: it swept beyond the equipment-thronged spaceport and over the shimmering billows of bluebright, to the mountains of the Crescent almost twenty kilometers away. But tankers' blood has in it a turtle component that is more comfortable on the ground than above it, and the little officer felt claws on his intestines as he looked out.

No similar discomfort seemed to be disturbing the other men in the room, all in the black and silver of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Guards of the Republic, though in name they were armor officers. "Had a bit of action today, Colonel?" said a cheerful, fit-looking major. Hammer did not remember him even though a year ago he had been Second in Command of the Guards.

"Umm, a skirmish," Hammer said as he turned. The Guardsman held out to him one of the two thimble-sized crystals he carried. In the heart of each flickered an azure fire. "Why, thank you—" the major's name was patterned in the silver highlights below his left lapel—"Mestern."

"No doubt you have seen much worse with your mercenaries, eh Colonel?" a voice called mockingly from across the room.

Karl August Raeder lounged in imperial state in the midst of a dozen admiring junior officers. He had been the executive officer of the Guards for the past year—ever since Hammer took command of the foreign regiment raised to smash the scattered units of the Army of Melpomone.

"Mercenaries, Karl?" Hammer repeated. A threat rasped through the surface mildness of his tone. "Yes, they cash their paychecks. There may be a few others in this room who do, hey?"

"Oh. . . ," someone murmured in the sudden quiet, but there was no way to tell what he meant by it. Raeder did not move. The blood had drawn back to yellow his smooth tan, and where the cushions had borne his languid hands they now were dimpled cruelly. Two men in the lounge had reached officer status in the Guards without enormous family wealth behind them. Hammer was one, Raeder was the other.

He strained at a breath. In build, he and Hammer were not dissimilar: the latter brown-haired and somewhat shorter, a trifle more of the hourglass in his shoulders and waist; Raeder blond and trim, slender in a rapier sort of way and quite as deadly. His uniform of natural silk and leather was in odd contrast to Hammer's khaki battledress, but there was nothing of fop or sloven in either man.

"Pardon," the Guardsman said, "I would not have thought this a company in which one need explain patriotism; there are men who fight for their homelands, and then there are the dregs, the gutter-sweepings of a galaxy, who fight for the same reason they pimped and sold themselves before our government—let me finish, please!" (though only Hammer's smile had moved) "—misguidedly, I submit, offered them more money to do what Frieland citizens could have done better!"

"My boys are better citizens than some born on Frieland who stayed there wiping their butts—"

"A soldier goes where he is ordered!" Raeder was standing.

"A *soldier*—"

Dead silence. Hammer's sentence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

broke like an axed cord. He looked about the lounge at the twenty-odd men, most of them his ex-comrades and all, like Raeder, men who had thought him mad to post out of the Guards for the sake of a combat command. Hammer laughed. He inverted the stim cone on the inside of his wrist and said approvingly, "Quite a view from up here. If it weren't such a good target, you could make it your operations center." As if in the midst of a normal conversation, he faced back toward the exterior and added, "By the way, what sort of operations are you expecting? I would have said the fighting here was pretty well over, and I'd be surprised at the government sending the Guards in for garrison duty."

The whispering that had begun when Hammer turned was stilled again. It was Raeder who cleared his throat and said in a tone between triumph and embarrassment, "Col Rijsdal may know. He . . . he has remained in his quarters since we landed." Rijsdal had not had a sober day in the past three years since he had acceded to an enormous estate on Frieland. "No doubt we are to provide proper, ah, background for such official pronouncements as the Secretary will make to the populace."

Hammer nodded absently as if he believed the black and silver of a parade regiment would overawe the Mels more effectively than could his own scarred killers, the men who had rammed Frieland suzerainty down Mel throats after twelve regiments of regulars had tried and failed. But the Guards were impressively equipped . . . and all their gear had been landed.

Five hundred worlds had imported bluebright leaves, with most of the tonnage moving through Southport. The handful of Frisian vessels scattered on the field looked lost, but traffic would pick up now that danger was over. For the moment, hundreds of Guard vehicles gave it a specious life. In the broad wedge of his vision Hammer could see two rocket batteries positioned as neatly as chess pieces on the huge playing surface. The center of each cluster was an ammunition hauler, low and broad-chassied. Within its thin armor sheetings were the racks of 150 mm shells; everything from armor-piercing rounds with a second stage to accelerate them before impact, to antipersonnel cases loaded with hundreds of separate bomblets. The haulers rested on the field; no attempt had been made to dig them in.

The six howitzers of each battery were sited about their munitions in a regular hexagon, each joined to the hauler by the narrow strip of a conveyor. In action the hogs could kick out shells at five-second intervals, so the basic load of twenty rounds carried by the howitzer itself needed instant replenishment from the hauler's store. Their stubby gun-tubes gave them guidance and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an initial boost, but most of the acceleration came beyond the muzzle. They looked grim and effective; still, it nagged Hammer to see that nobody had bothered to defilade them.

"A pretty sight," said Mestern. Conversation in the lounge was back to a normal level.

Hammer squeezed the last of his stim cone into the veins of his wrist and let the cool shudder pass through him before saying, "The Republic buys the best, and that's the only way to go when a battle's hanging on it. Not that you don't need good crews to man the gear."

Mestern pointed beyond the howitzers toward a wide-spaced ring of gun trucks. "Latest thing in arty defense," he said. "Each of those cars mounts an eight-barrel powergun, only 30 mm but they're high-intensity. They've got curst near the range of a tank's 200—thirty, forty kilometers if you've that long a sight line. With our radar hook-up and the satellite, we can just about detonate a shell as soon as it comes over the horizon."

"Nice theory," Hammer agreed. "I doubt you can swing the rig fast enough to catch the first salvo, but maybe placing them every ten degrees like that . . . where you've got the terrain to allow it. The Mels never had arty worth cop anyway, of course."

He paused, not sure he wanted to comment further. The grounded tanks and combat cars of the regiment were in an even perimeter at the edge of the circular field. Their dull iridium armor was in evident contrast to the ocher soil on which they rested. "You really ought to have dug in," Hammer said at last.

"Oh, the field's been stabilized to two meters down," the major protested innocently, "and I don't think the Mels are much of a threat now."

Hammer shook his head in irritation. "Lord!" he snorted, "The Mels aren't any threat at all after this morning. But just on general principals, when you set up in a war zone—*any* war zone—you set up as if you were going to be hit. Via, you may as well park your cars on Frieland for all the good they'd do if it dropped in the pot."

"The good colonel has been away from soldiers too long," whipped Raeder savagely. "Major Mestern, would you care to enlighten him as to how operations can be conducted by a real regiment—even though a gutter militia would be incapable of doing so?"

"I don't . . . think. . . ," Mestern stuttered in embarrassment. His fingers twiddled an empty stim cone.

"Very well, then I will," the blond XO snapped. Hammer was facing him again. This time the two men were within arm's length. "The Regiment of Guards is using satellite reconnaisance, Colonel," Raeder announced sneeringly. "The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same system in operation when you were in charge here, but we are *using* it, you see."

"We used it. We—"

"Pardon, Colonel, permit me to explain and there will be fewer needless questions."

Hammer relaxed with a smile. There was a tiger's certainty behind its humor. "No, your pardon. Continue."

Hammer had killed two men in semi-legal duels fought on Frieland's moon. Raeder chuckled, unconcerned with his rival's sudden mildness. "So," he continued, "no Mel force could approach without being instantly sighted."

He stared at Hammer, who said nothing. If the Guardsman wanted to believe no produce truck could drop a Mel platoon into bunkers dug by a harvesting crew—spotting the activity was no problem, interpreting it though—well, it didn't matter now. But it proved again what Hammer had known since before he was landed, that a lack of common sense was what had so hamstrung the regular army that his Slammers had to be formed.

Of course, "common sense" meant to Hammer doing what was necessary to complete a task. And that sometimes created problems of its own.

"Our howitzers can shatter them ninety kilometers distant," Raeder lectured on, "and our tanks can pierce all but the heaviest armor at line of sight, Colonel." He gestured arrogantly toward the skyline behind Hammer. "Anything that can be seen can be destroyed."

"Yeah, it's always a mistake to underrate technology," agreed the man in khaki.

"So," Raeder said with a crisp nod. "It is possible to be quite efficient without being—" his eyes raked Hammer's stained, worn coveralls—"shoddy. When we hold the review tomorrow, it will be interesting to consider your . . . force . . . beside the Guard."

"Via, only two of my boys are in," Hammer said, "though for slickness I'd bet Joachim against anybody you've got." He looked disinterestedly at the drink dispenser. "We'll all be back in the field, as soon as I see what Tromp wants. We've got a clean-up operation mounted in the Crescent."

"There is a platoon present now," the Guardsman snapped. "It will remain, as you will remain, until you receive other orders."

Hammer walked away without answering. Bigger men silently moved aside, clearing a path to the dispenser. Raeder locked his lips, murder-tense; but a bustle at the central dropshaft caused him to spin around. His own aide, a 15-year old scion of his wife's house, had emerged when the column dilated. Rather than use the PA systen built into the lounge before it was commandeered as an officers' club, messages were relayed through aides waiting on the floor below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Raeder's boy carried a small flag bearing the hollow rectangle of Raeder's rank, his ticket to enter the lounge and to set him apart from the officers. The boy might well be noble, but as yet he did not have a commission. He was to be made to remember it.

He whispered with animation into Raeder's ear, his own eyes open and fixed on the mercenary officer. Hammer ignored them both, talking idly as he blended another stim cone into his blood. The blond man's face slowly took on an expression of ruddy, mottled fury.

"Hammer!"

"The next time you determine where my boys will be, Colonel Raeder, I recommend that you ask me about it."

"You traitorous scum!" Raeder blazed, utterly beyond curbing his anger. "I closed the perimeter to everyone, *everyone*! And you bull your way through my guards, get them to pass—"

"Pass *my* men, Lieutenant-Colonel!" Hammer blasted as if he were shouting orders through the howling fans of a tank. All the tension of the former confrontation shuddered in the air again. Hammer was as set and grim as one of his war cars.

Raeder raised a clenched fist.

"Touch me and I'll shoot you where you stand," the mercenary said, and he had no need to raise his voice for emphasis. As if only Raeder and not the roomful of officers as well was listening, he said, "You give what orders you please, but I've still got an independant command. As of this moment. That platoon is blocking a pass in the Crescent, because that's what *I* want it to do, not sit around trying to polish away bullet scars because some cop-head thinks that's a better idea than fighting."

His body still as a gravestone, Raeder spoke; "*Now* you've got a command," he said thickly.

The wing of violence lifted from the lounge. Given time to consider, every man there knew that the battle was in other hands than Raeder's now—and that it would be fought very soon.

The dropshaft hissed again.

Joachim Steuben's dress was identical in design to his colonel's, but was in every other particular far superior. The khaki was unstained, the waist-belt genuine leather, polished to a rich chestnut sheen, and the coveralls themselves tapered to follow the lines of his boyish-slim figure. Perhaps it was the very beauty of the face smoothly framing Joachim's liquid eyes that made the aide look not foppish, but softly feminine.

There was a rich urbanity as well in his careful elegance. Newland, his homeworld, was an old colony with an emphasis on civilized trappings worthy of Earth herself. Just as Joachim's uniform was of a synthetic sleeker and less rugged than Hammer's, his sidearm was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hunched high on his right hip in a holster cut away to display the artistry of what it gripped. No weapon in the lounge, even that of Captain Ryssler—the Rysslers on whose land Frieland's second starport had been built—matched that of the Newlander for gorgeous detail. The receiver of the standard service pistol, a 1 cm powergun whose magazine held ten charged-plastic disks, had been gilded and carven by someone with a penchant for fleshy orchids. The stems and leaves had been filled with niello while the veins remained in a golden tracery. The petals themselves were formed from a breath-takingly-purple alloy of copper and gold. It was hard for anyone who glanced at it to realize that such a work of art was still, beneath its chasing, a lethal weapon.

"Colonel," he reported, his clear tenor a jewel in the velvet silence, "Secretary Tromp will see you now." Neither he nor Hammer showed the slightest concern as to whether the others in the lounge were listening. Hammer nodded, wiping his palms on his thighs.

Behind his back, Joachim winked at Col Raeder before turning. The Guardsman's jaw dropped and something mewled from deep in his chest.

It may have been imagination that made Joachim's hips seem to rotate a final purple highlight from his pistol as the dropshaft sphinctered shut.

* * *

When the Guards landed, all but the fifteenth story of the Southport Tower was taken over for officers' billets. That central floor was empty save for Tromp, his staff, and the pair of scowling Guardsmen confronting the dropshaft as it opened.

"I'll stay with you, sir," Joachim said. The guards were in dress blacks but they carried full-sized shoulder weapons, 2 cm powerguns inferior only in rate of fire to the tribarrels mounted on armored vehicles.

"Go on back to our quarters," Hammer replied. He stepped off the platform. His aide showed no signs of closing the shaft in obedience. "Martyrs' *blood*!" Hammer cursed, "do as I say!" He wiped his palms again and added, more mildly, "That's where I'll need you, I think."

"If you say so, sir." The door sighed closed behind Hammer, leaving him with the guards.

"Follow the left corridor to the end—sir," one of the big men directed grudgingly. The colonel nodded and walked off without comment. The two men were convinced their greatest worth lay in the fact that they were Guardsmen. To them it was an insult that another man would deliberately leave the Regiment, especially to take service with a band of foreign scum. Hammer could have used his glass-edged tongue on the pair as he had at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perimeter when he sent his platoon through, but there was no need. He was not the man to use any weapon for entertainment's sake.

The unmarked wood-veneer door opened before he could knock. "Why, good afternoon, Captain," the mercenary said, smiling into Stilchey's haggardness. "Recovering all right from this morning?"

"Go on through," the captain said. "He's expecting you."

Hammer closed the inner door behind him, making a soft echo to the thump of the hall panel. Tromp rose from behind his desk, a great gray bear confronting a panther.

"Colonel, be seated," he rumbled. Hammer nodded cautiously and obeyed.

"We have a few problems which must be cleared up soon," the big man said. He looked the soldier full in the face. "I'll be frank. You already know why I'm here."

"Our job's done," Hammer said without inflexion. "It costs money to keep the Sl—the auxilliary regiment mobilized when it isn't needed, so it's time to bring my boys home according to contract, hey?"

The sky behind Tromp was a turgid mass, gray with harbingers of the first storm of autumn. It provided the only light in the room, but neither man moved to turn on the wall illuminators. "You were going to say 'Slammers', weren't you?" Tromp mused. "Interesting. I had wondered if the newscasters coined the nickname themselves or if they really picked up a usage here. . . ."

"The boys started it. . . .It seemed to catch on."

"But I'm less interested in that than another word," Tromp continued with the sudden weight of an anvil falling. " 'Home.' And that's the problem, Colonel. As you know."

"The only thing I could tell you is what I tell recruits when they sign on," Hammer said, his voice quiet but his forehead sweat-gemmed in the cool air. "By their contract, they became citizens of Frieland with all rights and privileges thereof. . . .Great Dying *Lord*, sir, that's what brought most of my boys here! Look, I don't

****

THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP

56 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10014
741-0270

****

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to tell you what's been happening everywhere the past ten years, twenty—there are thousands and thousands of soldiers, good soldiers, who wound up on one losing side or another. If everybody that fought alongside them had been as good, and maybe if they'd had the equipment Frieland could buy for them . . . I tell you, sir, there's no one in the galaxy to match them. And what they fight for isn't me, I don't care what cop you've heard, it's that chance at peace, at stability that their fathers had and their fathers' fathers, but they lost somewhere when everything started to go wrong. They'd *die* for that chance!"

"But instead," Tromp stated, "they killed for it."

"Don't give *me* any cop about morals!" the soldier snarled. "Whose idea was it that we needed control of bluebright shipments to be sure of getting metals from Taunus?"

"Morals?" replied Tromp with a snort. "Morals be hanged, Colonel. This isn't a galaxy for men with morals, you don't have to tell me that. Oh, they can moan about what went on here and they have—but nobody, not even the reporters, has been looking very hard. And they wouldn't find many to listen if they had been. You and I are paid to get things done, Hammer, and there won't be any blame except for failure."

The soldier hunched his shoulders back against the chair. "Then it's all right?" he asked in wonder. "After all I worried, all I planned, my boys can go back to Frieland with me?"

Tromp smiled. "Over my dead body," he said pleasantly. The two men stared at each other without expression on either side.

"I'm missing something," said Hammer flatly. "Fill me in."

The civilian rotated a flat datavisor toward Hammer and touched the indexing tab with his thumb. A montage of horror flickered across the screen—smoke drifting sullenly from a dozen low-lying buildings; a mass grave, reopened and being inspected by a trio of Frieland generals; another village without evident damage but utterly empty of human life—

"Chakma," Hammer said in sudden recognition. "Via, you ought to thank me for the way we handled that one. I'd half thought of using a nuke."

"Gassing the village was better?" the councillor asked with mild amusement.

"It was quiet. No way you could have kept reporters from learning about a nuke," Hammer explained.

"And the convoy runs you made with hostages on each car?" Tromp asked smilingly.

"The only hostages we used were people we knew—and they knew we knew—" Hammer's finger slashed emphasis—" were related to Mel soldiers who hadn't turned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

themselves in. We cut ambushes by a factor of ten, and we even had some busted when a Mel saw his wife or a kid riding the lead car., Look, I won't pretend it didn't happen, but I didn't make any bones about what I planned when I put in for transfer. This is bloody late in the day to bring it up."

"Right, you did your duty," the big civilian agreed. "And I'm going to do mine by refusing to open Frieland to 5,000 men with the training you gave them. Lord and Martyrs, Colonel, you tell me we're going through a period when more govenments are breaking up than aren't—what would happen to *our* planet if we set your animals loose in the middle of it?"

"There's twelve regiments of regulars here," Hammer argued.

"And if they were worth the cop in their trousers, we wouldn't have needed your auxilliaries," retorted Tromp inflexibly. "Face facts."

The colonel sagged. "OK," he muttered, turning his face toward the sidewall, "I won't pretend I didn't expect it, what you just said. I owed it to the boys, they . . . they believe when they ought to have better sense, and I owed them to try. . . ." The soldier's fingers beat a silent tattoo on the yielding material of his chair. He stood before speaking further. "There's a way out of it, Secretary," he said.

"I know there is."

"No!" Hammer shouted, his voice denying the flat finality of

FISHERMEN

BE READY TO CATCH THE BIG FISH! ANYTIME! ANYWHERE!

NEW FISHING ROD FITS IN YOUR POCKET! TELESCOPES TO A FULL 6 FEET!

You'll never miss a chance to fish again! 6 foot Fishing Rod telescopes down to only 15½". Stows away in glove compartment, back pack, travel bag or pocket. Great for casting, spinning or spin-cast use. Tubular glass rod, rugged. Positive grip cork handle. Complete with it's own vinyl case. You would expect to pay more than $25.00 for this fantastic Rod—Yours for only

9.95 on introductory offer!

Mail orders add $2.00 for tax and postage

Approved by Dr. Trikie—Used on his big fishing expedition!

L. D. PARSONS
18592 MADISON AVENUE
CASTRO VALLEY, CALIF.
94546

Tromp's as he spun to face the bigger man again. "No, there's a better way, a way that'll work. You didn't want to hire one of the freelance regiments you could have had because they didn't have the equipment to do the job fast. But it takes a government and a curst solvent one to equip an armored regiment—none of the privateers had that sort of capital."

He paused for breath. "Partly true," Tromp agreed. "Of course, we preferred to have a commander—" he smiled—"whose first loyalty was to Frieland."

Hammer spoke on, choking with his effort to convince the patient, gray iceberg of a man across from him, "Frieland's always made her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money by trade. Let's go into another business—let's hire out the best equipped, best trained—by the Lord, *best*—regiment in the galaxy!"

"And the reason that won't work, Colonel," Tromp rumbled coolly, "is not that it would fail, but that it would succeed. It takes a very solvent government, as you noted, to afford the capital expense of maintaining a first-rate armored regiment. The Melpomonese, for instance, could never have fielded a regiment of their own. But if . . . the sort of unit you suggest was available, they could have hired it for a time, could they not?"

"A few months, sure," Hammer admitted with an angry flick of his hands, "But—"

"Nine months, perhaps a year, Colonel," the civilian went on inexorably. "It would have bankrupted them, but I think they would have paid for the same reason they resisted what was clearly overwhelming force. And not even Frieland could have economically taken Melpomone if the locals were stiffened by—by your Slammers, let us say."

"Lord!" Hammer shouted snapping erect, "of course we wouldn't take contracts against Frieland."

"Men change, Colonel," Tromp replied, rising to his own feet. "Men die. And even if they don't, the very existance of a successful enterprise will free the capital for others to duplicate it. It won't be a wild gamble any more. And Frieland will *not* be the cause of that state of affairs while I am at her helm. If you're the patriot we assumed you were when we gave you this command, you will order your men to come in by platoons and be disarmed."

The smaller man's face was sallow and his hands shook until he hooked them in his pistol belt. "But you can't even let them go then, can you?" he whispered. "It might be all right on Frieland where there wouldn't be any recruiting by outsiders. But if you just turn my boys loose, somebody else will snap them up, somebody else who reads balance sheets. Maybe trained personnel would be enough of an edge to pry loose equipment on the cuff. Life's rough, sure, and there are plenty of people willing to gamble a lot to make a lot more. Then we're where you didn't want us, aren't we? Except that the boys are going to have some notions of their own about Frieland. . . .What do you plan, Secretary? Blowing up the freighter with everybody aboard? Or will you just have the Guards shoot them down when they've been disarmed?"

Tromp turned away for the first time. Lightning was flashing from cloud peak to cloud peak, and the mass that lowered over the Crescent was already linked to the ground by a haze of rain. "They put us in charge of things because we see them as they are, Colonel," Tromp

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. The vitril sheet in front of him trembled to the distant thunder. "Frieland got very good value from you, because you didn't avoid unpleasant decisions; you saw the best way and took it—be damned to appearances.

"I would not be where I am today if I were not the same sort of man. I don't ask you to like this course of action—I don't like it myself—but you're a pragmatist too, Hammer, you see that it's the only way clear for our own people."

"Secretary, anything short of having my boys killed, but—"

"Curse it, man!" Tromp shouted, "haven't you taken a look around you recently? Lives are cheap, Colonel, lives are very cheap! You've got to have loyalty to something more than just men."

"No," said the man in khaki with quiet certainty. Then, "May I be excused, sir?"

"Get out of here."

Tromp was seated again, his own face a mirror of the storm, when Capt Stilchey slipped in the door through which Hammer had just exited. "Your lapel mike picked it all up."

The young officer gloated conspiratorially. "The traitor."

Tromp's expression forced itself into normal lines. "You did as I explained might be necessary?"

"Right. As soon as I heard the word 'disarmed' I ordered men to wait for Hammer in his quarters." Stilchey's gleeful expression expanded to a smile of real delight. "I added a . . . refinement, sir. There was the possibility that Hammer would—you know how he is, hard not to obey—tell the guards be cursed and leave them standing. So I took the liberty of suggesting to Colonel Raeder that he lead four men himself for the duty. I used your name, sir, but I rather think the colonel would have gone along with the idea anyway."

The captain's laughter hacked loudly through the suite before he realized that Tromp still sat in iron gloom, cradling his chin in his hands.

* * *

The room was a shifting bowl of reds and hot orange in which the khaki uniforms of Worzer and Steuben seemed misplaced. The only sound was a faint buzzing, the leakage of the bone-conduction speakers implanted in either man's right mastoid. Hammer, like Tromp, had left his lapel mike keyed to his aides.

"You'd best take your pistol off, you know. They'll be jumpy."

"You're the boss," Worzer grunts. Alone, now, in the room he unlatches his holstered weapon and tosses the rig to the floor in front of him. It is a fixed blackness against the grays that shift beneath it. Glass tinkles in the kitchen. Men on every world have set up stills, generally as their first constructions. Even in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a luxury hotel, Worzer's habits are those of a lifetime. Hammer's microphone no longer broadcasts voices.

The door valves open.

"Freeze!" orders the first man through. He is small and blond, his eyes as cold as the silver frosting his uniform. The glowing tab of a master door key is in his left hand, a pistol in his right. The Guardsmen fanning to each side of him swing heavy powerguns at waist level, the muzzle's black screams in a glitter of iridium. Two more men stand beyond the door, facing either end of the hallway with their weapons ready.

"Move and you're dead," the officer hisses to Worzer. Then, to his tight-lipped subordinates, "Watch for the other one—the deviate."

The kitchen door rotates to pass Joachim. His left hand holds a silver tray with a fruit-garnished drink on it. Reflections shimmer from the metal and the condensate on the glass. He smiles.

"You foul *beast*!" says the officer and his pistol turns toward the aide of its own seeming will. The enlisted men wait, uncertain.

"Me, Colonel Raeder?" Joachim's voice lilts. He is raising the tray and it arcs away from his body in a gentle movement that catches Raeder's eyes for the instant that the Newlander's right hand dips and—a cyan flash from Joachim's pistol links the two men. Raeder's mouth is open but silent. His eyeballs are bulging outward against the pressure of exploding nerve tissue. There is a hole between them and it winks twice more in the flash of Joachim's shots. Two spent cases hang in the air to the Newlander's right; a third is jammed, smeared across his pistol's ejection port. None of the Guardsmen have begun to fall, though a gout of blood pours from the neck of the right-hand man.

It is two-fifths of a second from the moment when Joachim reached for his pistol.

Worzer had been ready. He leaped as Steuben's shots flickered across the room, twisting the shoulder weapon from a Guardsman who did not realize he was already dead. The stocky Curwinite hit the floor on his right side, searching the doorway with the powergun. In the hall, a guard shouted as he spun himself to face the shooting. Joachim's jammed pistol had thudded on the floor but Worzer wasted no interest on what the aide might do—you did not worry about Joachim in a firefight, he took care of himself. The non-com had been squeezing even as he fell, and only a feather of trigger pressure was left to take up when the Guardsman's glittering uniform sprouted above the sights.

Heated air thumped the walls of the room. The body ballooned under the cyan impact. The big-bore packed enough joules to vaporize much of a man's abdomen at that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

range, and the Frielander hurtled back against the far wall. His tunic was afire and spilling coils of intestine.

The boots of the remaining Guardsman clattered on the tile as he bolted for the dropshaft. Joachim snaked his head and the pistol he had snatched from Raeder through the doorway. Worzer and the big gun plunged into the corridor low to cover the other end. The shaft entrance opened even before the Frisian's outflung arm touched the summoning plate. Hammer, standing on the platform, shot him twice in the chest. The Guardsman pitched into the wall. As he did so, Joachim shot him again at the base of the skull. Joachim generally doubted other men's kills, a practice that had saved his life in the past.

Hammer glanced down at the jellied skull of the last Guardsman and grimaced. "Didn't anybody tell you about aiming at the body instead of getting fancy?" he asked Joachim. Neither man commented that the final shot had been aimed within a meter of Hammer.

The Newlander shrugged. "They should've been wearing body armor," he said offhandedly. "Coppy fools."

The colonel scooped up both the powerguns from the corridor and gestured his men back into the room. The air within stank of blood and hot plastic. Death had been too sudden to be prefaced with pain, but the faces of the Guardsmen all held slack amazement. Hammer shook his head. "With five thousand of you to choose from," he said to Joachim, "didn't they think I could find a decent bodyguard?"

The Newlander smiled. After his third quick shot, the expended disk had been too hot to spin out whole and had instead flowed across the mechanism when struck by the jet of ejection gas. Joachim was carefully chipping away at the cooled plastic with a stylus while the pistol he had taken from his first victim lay on the table beside him. Its muzzle had charred the veneer surface. "There isn't enough gas in a handgun ejector to cool the chamber properly," he said, pretending to ignore his colonel's indirect praise.

"Via, you hurried cause you wanted all of them," Worzer laughed. He thumbed a loaded round into the magazine of the shoulder gun he had appropriated. "What's the matter—don't you want the Colonel to bother bringing me along the next time 'cause I scare away all your pretty friends?"

Hammer forced a smile at the interchange, but it was only a shimmer across lines of fear and anger. On one wall was a communicator, a flat, meter-broad screen whose surface was an optical pickup as well as a display. Hammer stepped in front of it and drew the curtain to blank the remainder of the room. His fingers flicked the controls, bringing Capt Stilchey into startled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

focus. Tromp's aide blinked, but before he could speak the colonel said, "We've got three minutes, Stilchey, and there's no time to cop around. Put me through."

Stilchey's mouth closed. Without comment he reached out and pressed his own control panel. With liquid abruptness his figure was replaced by the hulking power of Secretary Tromp, seated against the closing sky.

"Tell the Guard to ground arms, Secretary," Hammer ordered in a voice trembling with adrenalin. "Tell them now and I'll get on the horn to my boys—it'll be close."

"I'm sorry for the necessity of your arrest, Colonel," the big man began, "but—"

"Idiot!" Hammer shouted at the pickup, and his arm slashed aside the drapes to bare the room. "I heard your terms—now listen to mine. I've arranged for a freighter to land tomorrow at 0700 and the whole regiment's leaving on it. I'll leave you an indenture for the fair value of the gear, and it'll be paid off as soon as contracts start coming in. But the Lord help you, Tromp, if anybody tries to stop my boys."

"Capt Stilchey," Tromp ordered coolly, "sound general quarters. As for you, Colonel," he continued without taking verbal notice of the carnage behind the small officer, "I assure you that the possibility you planned something like this was in my mind when I ordered the Guards landed with me."

"Secretary, we planned what we'd do if we had to a month and a half ago. Don't be so curst a fool to doubt my boys can execute orders without me to hold their hands. If I don't radio in the next few seconds, you won't have the Guards to send back. Lord and *Martyrs,* man, don't you understand what you see back of me? This isn't some coppy parade!"

"Sir," came Stilchey's thin voice from off-screen, "Fire Central reports all satellite signals are being jammed. The armored units in the Crescent began assembling thirty—Lord! Lord! *Sir*!"

A huge scarlet dome swelled upward across the vitril behind Tromp. The window powdered harmlessly an instant later as the shock wave threw man and desk toward Hammer's image. The entire hotel shuddered to the blast.

"They're blowing up the artillery," the captain bleated. "The ammunition—" His words were drowned in the twin detonations of the remaining batteries.

Hammer switched the communicator off. "Early," he muttered. "Not that it mattered." His face was set like that of a man who had told his disbelieving mechanic that something was wrong with the brakes, and who now feels the pedal sink to the firewall to prove him fatally correct. "Don't go to sleep," he grunted to his companions. "Tromp knows he's lost, and I'm not sure how he'll react."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But only Worzer was in the room with him.

* * *

Though Tromp was uninjured, he rose only to his knees. He had seen Capt Stilchey when the jagged sheet of iridium buzz-sawed into the suite and through him. Scuttling like a stiff-legged bear, the civilian made his way to the private dropshaft built into the room. He pretended to ignore the warm greasiness of the floor, but by the time the platform began to sink his whole body was trembling.

Ground floor was a chaos of half-dressed officers who had been on the way to their units when fire raked the encampment. Tromp pushed through a trio of chattering captains in the branch corridor; the main lobby of bronze and off-planet stonework was packed and static, filled with men afraid to go out and uncertain where to hide. The councillor cursed. The door nearest him was ajar and he kicked it fully open. The furniture within was in sleep-mode, the self-cleaning sheets rumpled on the bed, but there was no one present. The vitril outer wall had pulverized; gouges in the interior suggested more than a shock wave had been responsible for the damage.

Seen through it, the starport had become a raving hell.

Four hundred meters from the hotel, one of the anti-artillery weapons was rippling sequential flame skyward from its eight barrels. High in a boiling thunderhead at its radar-chosen point of aim, man-made lightning flared magenta; high explosive caught in flight. Almost simultaneously a dart of cyan more intense than the sun lanced into the Guard vehicle. Metal heated too swiftly to melt and sublimed in a glowing ball that silhouetted the gun crew as it devoured them. Hammer's tanks, bunkered in the Crescent, were using satellite-computed deflections to rake the open Guard positions. Twenty kilometers and the thin armor of the lighter vehicles were no defense against the 200 mm powerguns.

Tromp stepped over the low sill and began to run. The field was wet and a new slash of rain pocked its gleam. Three shells popped high in the air. He ignored them, pounding across the field in a half-crouch. For a moment the whistling beginning to fill the sky as if from a thousand tiny mouths meant nothing to him either—then realization rammed a scream from his throat and he threw himself prone. The bomblets showering down from the shells went off on impact all across the field, orange flashes that each clipped the air with scores of fragments. Panic and Hammer's tanks had silenced the Guard's defensive weaponry. Now the rocket howitzers were free to rain in wilful death.

But the tanks, Tromp thought as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he stumbled to his feet, they can't knock out the tanks from twenty kilometers and they can't capture the port while the Guard still has that punch. The surprise was over now. Left fans keened from the perimeter as the great silvery forms of armored vehicles shifted from their targeted positions. The combatants were equal, and a stand-off meant disaster for the mercenaries.

Much of the blood staining Tromp's clothing was his own, licked from his veins by shrapnel. Incoming shells were bursting at ten-second intervals. Munitions shortages would force a slowdown soon, but for the moment anyone who stood to run would be scythed down before his third step. Even flat on his belly Tromp was being stung by hot metal. His goal, the ten-place courier vessel that had brought him to Melpomone, was still hopelessly far off. The remains, however, of one of the Guard's self-propelled howitzers lay like a cleat-kicked drink-can thirty meters distant. Painfully the councillor crawled into its shelter. Hammer's punishing fire had not been directed at the guns themselves but at the hauler in the midst of each battery. After three shots the secondary explosions had stripped the Guard of all its ill-sited artillery.

A line of rain rippled across the field, streaking dried blood from Tromp's face and whipping the pooled water. He was not running away. There was one service yet that he could perform for Frieland, and he had to be home to accomplish it. After that—and he thought of it not as revenge but as a final duty—he would not care that reaction would assuredly make him the scapegoat for the catastrophe now exploding all around him. It was obvious that Hammer had ordered his men to disturb the spaceport as little as possible so that the mercenaries would not hinder their own embarkation. The lightly-rattling shrapnel crumpled gun crews and the bewildered Guard infantry, but it would not harm the port facilities themselves nor the ships docked there.

For the past several minutes no powerguns had lighted the field. The bunkered mercenaries had either completed their programs or ceased fire when a lack of secondary explosions informed them that the remaining Guard vehicles had left their targeted positions. The defenders had at first fired wild volleys at no better target than the mountain range itself, but a few minutes' experience had taught them that the return blasts aimed at their muzzles were far more effective then their own could possibly be. Now there was a lull in the shelling as well.

Tromp eased a careful glance beyond the rim of his shelter, the buckled plenum chamber of the gun carriage. His ship was a horizontal needle three hundred meters distant. The vessel was unlighted, limned as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a gray shadow by cloud-hopping lighting. The same flashes gleamed momentarily on the wet turtle-backs of a dozen tanks and combat cars in a nearby cluster, their fans idling. All the surviving Guard units must be clumped in similar hedgehogs across the port.

The big man tensed himself to run; then the night popped and crackled as a Guard tank began firing out into the storm. Tromp counted three shots before a cyan dazzle struck the engaged vehicle amidships and its own ammunition went off with an electric crash. The clustered vehicles were lit by a blue-green fire that expanded for three seconds, dissolving everything within twenty meters of its center. One of the remaining combat cars spun on howling fans, but it collapsed around another bolt before it could pull clear. There were Guardsmen on the ground now, running from their vehicles. Tromp's eyes danced with afterimages of the exploding tank, and for the first time he understood why Stilchey had been so terrified by the destruction of the car he might have ridden in.

Half a dozen shots ripped from beyond the perimeter and several struck home together. All the Guard blowers were burning now, throwing capering shadows beyond the councillor's shelter. Then, threading their way around the pools of slag, the steam and the dying fires, came a trio of tanks. Even without the scarlet wand wavering from each turret for identification, Tromp would have realized these were not the polished beauties of the Guard. The steel skirts of their plenum chambers were rusty and brush-worn. One's gouged turret still glowed where a heavy powergun had hit it glancingly; the muzzle of its own weapon glowed too, and the bubbling remains of the perimeter defense left no doubt whose bolts had been more accurately directed. The fighting had been brief, Hammer's platoons meeting the disorganized Guardsmen with point-blank volleys. The victors' hatches were open and as they swept in toward the central tower, Tromp could hear their radios crackling triumphant instructions. Other wands floated across the immense field, red foxfire in the rain.

The shooting had stopped. Now, before the combat cars and infantry followed up the penetrations their tanks had made, Tromp stood and ran to his ship. His career was ruined, of that he had no doubt. No amount of deceit would cover his role in the creation of the Slammers or his leadership in the attempted suppression. All that was left to Nicholas Tromp was the sapphire determination that the national power which he had worked four decades to build should not fall with him. They could still smash Hammer before he got started, using Frieland's own fleet and the fleets of a dozen other worlds. The cost

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would leave even Frieland groaning, but they could blast the Slammers inexorably from space wherever they were landed. For the sake of his planet's future, the excision had to be made, damn the cost.

And after Tromp fell in disgrace in the next week or two weeks at most, there would be no man left with the power to force the action or the foresight to see its necessity. Panting, he staggered through his vessel's open lock. The interior, too, was unlighted. That was not surprising in view of the combat outside, but one of the three crewmen should have been waiting at the lock. "Where are you?" Tromp called angrily.

The lights went on. There was a body at the big Frisian's feet. From the cockpit forward stretched another hairline of blood still fresh enough to ooze. "I'm here," said a cultured voice from behind.

Tromp froze. Very slowly, he began to turn his head.

"People like you," the voice continued, "with dreams too big for men to fit into, don't see the same sort of world that the rest of us do. And sometimes a fellow who does one job well can see where his job has to be done, even though a better man has overlooked it. Anyhow, Secretary, there always was one thing you and I could agree on—lives *are* cheap."

Surely Joachim's wrists were too slim, Tromp thought, to raise his heavy pistol so swiftly. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INFERNO

Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

We've lost Corbett.

Four of us managed to get this far: deep into this funnel-shaped pit that seems to be a full-scale mockup of Dante's Inferno. It's been a hairy, scary trip. We've waded through boiling blood, we've been stranded in a desert under flakes of fire. A devil-car smashed Billy to jelly, but he healed. We always heal; we can't die. The Builders have done something to our bodies.

The lower we get, the worse it gets. It seems to be an entertainment playground for sadomasochists, some of whom might not be human . . . or else we've actually died and gone to Dante Alighieri's strange Hell. I've seen so many miracles that I'm not sure any more. The place does have a kind of internal logic.

It was the second pit of the Eighth Circle that lost us Corbett. He couldn't take what they were doing to the advertising men. He ran back toward the cliff, screaming that he was going back to the place of the winds, where he belongs. It's way upslope. I don't know how he'll get up the cliff.

Billy's still with us. Maybe he really is Billy the Kid; we've seen enough revived dead men. He's not too bright, and the torture chamber around us doesn't bother him much. I'm glad he's here. He can fight.

The tortures bother Benito even less. He keeps calling them "justice". It gives me the chills. He could be a devil himself . . . or one of the Inferno-land's paying customers. Geryon is a devil, and Geryon knew him.

On the face of it he's a stolid fat man with a strong faith in Catholicism and Dante Alighieri's map. We've found mistakes in Dante's descriptions, and places that Dante never saw. Still we follow Benito along Dante's route, down to the bottom of everything, where Dante described a way out of Hell . . . for a living man whose guide can call on angels.

We can't go back; the cliff would stop us. There are devils around us: big half-humanoids, and Geryon, an aquatic life-form wearing what might be an antigravity belt. So we can't stay here. We have to keep going down.

Part III

XX

THE THIRD GULLY was narrower, and cleaner. From the edge it looked empty, so that I wondered if there were a sin nobody would commit, or one nobody thought of. But lights danced dimly down there . . .

From the arch it was clearer. I made out long rows of holes cut into the stone. The holes had raised stone rims. Most of them were occupied, each by a pair of human feet sticking straight up into the air. The feet danced. Flames burned on their soles.

"Another obsolete sin," said Benito. "Selling holy offices. Simony."

Billy said, "Huh?"

I translated. "Those guys would take money to make a priest."

There were signs by some of the holes. "Wharton School of Theology. Earn your Th. D. in just ten weeks! Write Registrar for application."

And another: "Meditation. The new way to inner peace and serenity. Meet the greatest guru of all time. Registration fee, $350.00."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Billy was aghast. "God does *that* to them? Just for *that*?"

"They stole what belongs to God," Benito said. "There are Popes in those baptismal fonts. And many others. The denomination does not seem important. What matters is the sale of the gifts of God."

Why would aliens care about that? Well, Carpentier?

"Benito, I don't like it here," Billy said.

I patted his shoulder. "Me neither. Let's get out." I felt the urge to run. At least I was safe from this pit. We all were. We'd never had Heavenly Gifts to sell.

The bridge over the fourth gully was just ahead, and I glanced into it from the top, intending to run on past. The strange sight held me. The damned flowed beneath us, and their heads had been turned back to front. Most of them were women.

"Fortune tellers," Benito said before I could ask. "They tried to see the future by magic."

And now they were not even allowed to watch where they were going. I shivered, thinking that a science fiction writer might well end up here. But no, I'd never used magic. Only logic, and it hadn't kept me out of Hell. "Why aren't all the scientists and economic prognosticators here?" I asked. "*They* try to foresee the future."

"Most of these appealed to Satan for aid. He gave it to them . . . or not. It is the appeal that weighs against them." He turned to move on.

Then I recognised one of the damned.

A little elderly lady, very prim and proper. She'd been a teacher in my nephew's school. Now she walked with her head turned backward, and tears ran down her spine and between her buttocks. I screamed. The damned looked up at me.

"Mrs. Herrnstein! Why?" I shouted.

She looked away. Then she stopped and looked up. Face and back turned toward us. She'd always been thin, and I'd never thought of her as particularly feminine. Certainly she wasn't feminine now. "I belong here, Mister Carpentier," she called. "Please leave. I don't want to be watched."

"You *belong* here?" I could *not* see Mrs. Herrnstein with a crystal ball.

"Yes. Whenever I had a pupil who had difficulty learning to read, I used—I was a bad teacher, Mister Carpentier."

"You were a *good* teacher! You taught Hal more in a year than he learned in five!"

"I was a good teacher with good pupils. But I could not be bothered with the ones who weren't so bright. If they had trouble learning to read, I said they had dyslexia."

"Are you here because of bad diagnoses?" This was monstrous!

"Dyslexia is not a diagnosis, Mister Carpentier. It is a prediction. It is a prediction that says that this child can never learn to read. And with that prediction on his record—why, strangely enough, none of them ever do. Unless they happen on a teacher who doesn't believe in educationese witchcraft."

"But—"

"It was witchcraft, Mister Carpentier. Please go now." She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked on, crying uncontrollably, her face toward us as she walked away. I watched until she was out of sight.

"She does not belong here," I insisted.

"Then perhaps she will not be here long," Benito answered dispassionately. "Yet—you will note that she did not agree with your judgement."

"Then she's wrong too!"

"Why do you feel so competent to judge everyone, Allen?"

"Get it through your thick head that it's *Big Juju* I'm judging—"

"It is God you are judging," he thundered.

"All *right*, it's God I'm judging. If He can judge me, I claim the right to judge Him!"

Billy seemed horrified by what I was saying. I was sorry for that. But Benito laughed and said, "How will you implement your judgement against God Himself?"

The only possible answer to that was a feeble one, maybe, but I used it. "By withholding my worship. Benito, do you realise that the God you worship keeps a private torture chamber?"

"Hardly private."

"Private or public, the God Allen Carpentier worships will have to meet higher standards than *that*!"

Benito didn't speak for a moment. Then he said, "We must hope our shouting was not heard. Look ahead."

* * *

From our position at the top of the arch we had a good view of the rims of the next gully. On both sides of the gap, horned black demons moved. They were larger than men, a little smaller than the demons in the first ditch, but like them they had horns and tail, and their skin was black ebony, very different from a black man's skin. They carried—

"Pitchforks?"

"Certainly," said Benito.

I couldn't help grinning a little. Pitchforks! I'd forgotten that detail. Had Walt Disney's cartoonists ever realised why their devils carried pitchforks?

"They must not see us," Benito said. "None of us are safe from them. They guard the pit of the grafters, of those who stole from positions of trust."

Billy shuddered. "Reckon they'd like me," he said. "Guess I took a few things from my bosses in my day. Not much, but some."

"Not me. Freelance writers don't have bosses," I said. Then I remembered the advance from Omniverse Publishing, nine years before I died. Somehow the novel had never jelled, and *let's play it safe here, Carpentier. Demons wouldn't understand the publishing business*.

There was cover at the bottom of the bridge. It was all a jumble of boulders. We waited our chance, then sprinted down the bridge while none of the demons were nearby. We were hidden before another group came past. We huddled together between the rocks.

"Too bad the bridges are staggered," I whispered. "We could have gone right across." The next bridge was thirty or forty yards to the left, with a troop of twenty-odd demons between.

"For us this is the second most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dangerous place in Hell," whispered Benito. "We must reach the next bridge without being seen. Cross at a dead run, and do not stop at the next pit. Run straight into it. There are no bridges in any case, and we could not reach one if any existed. The demons are on both sides of the pit.

Billy shifted restlessly. "Don't like running from nothing."

We must," Benito said simply. He pointed. A demon strode past.

A roughly human form nine feet tall, equipped with horns and hooves and a twitching tail. A capriform humanoid.

How glib, Carpentier. Capriform humanoid? Demon! Why play games with yourself?

The demon was carrying a human being, carrying him like a bowling ball, his claws inserted deep into the man's back. The man writhed and struggled. The demon didn't seem to notice. He called to three of the others. "How many New Yorkers this week?"

They joined him in front of our rock. One twitched his tail up to his mouth. Teeth like butcher knives gnawed at the end. "Twelve."

"Make it thirteen. And it's still Thursday on Earth. If Hideous wins the pool again I'll rip his face off."

"You could forget to report this one."

"Why not?" The first demon lifted his human burden to study it. "He hardly counts anyway. He stole a few hundred bucks from a friend who needed an eye operation." He addressed the man: "*You* won't tell on us, will you?"

"No. I swear," said the man. His voice was choked with agony.

"And you won't show your head above the pitch? Because if we see any sign of you—" The demon hefted his pitchfork suggestively. "We'll pull you out and tear you in little pieces and scatter you widely. It hurts a *lot*."

"I won't tell," said the man.

"Good," said the demon holding him; and he flung him. The man dropped below the rim with a mournful howl that ended in a sound half splash, half thud.

"What's down there?" Billy whispered.

I answered, "Boiling pitch."

"What'd he do?"

"Graft."

"I wanted to try to save him."

Benito said, "I would not save him if I could."

The demons passed on. Like the warriors around the lake of blood, they looked always into the pit, always away from us. If we were careful we could move, one at a time, flitting from rock to rock to—

"Gotcha!" a demon shouted, and I had a heart attack, right out there between two inadequate boulders. All they had to do was come and collect me; but they weren't looking. They were clumped at the rim, jabbing down.

A human form came up dripping gobbets of black pitch and trying to wriggle free of the tines of two pitchforks. I heard, "Boss Tweed, ain't it? We been checking with some of those dead men that're supposed to have voted your ticket—Hold him, Crazyred!" The man lurched free of one pitchfork, but the other held him fast. They beached him. They began to play with him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I touched Billy's shoulder. "Don't look. We can get a good way while they're busy."

We crawled like snakes. By the time the shade of Tweed had stopped screaming, we were opposite the bridge. I looked back once and had to close my eyes. The demons had opened him up and spread him out like a frog in biology class; but unlike the frog, he was still trying to get away.

Benito crouched like a sprinter. "Ready?"

"Yeah."

"Right."

We ran.

I heard a great roar of rage. I didn't look back. But as I went over the arch, last in line, I saw that the demons on the far side of the gully were running to meet us.

One was going to make it.

I stopped. Only for an instant; then I plunged down the arch behind Benito.

But Billy had doubled his speed.

The demon reached the end of the bridge off balance and skidding. "Come to Poppa!" he roared, and swung his pitchfork around.

He was a nanosecond late. Billy shot past the tines and ran up the demon and swarmed over the huge head.

The demon bellowed and tried to reverse eighteen feet of iron pitchfork. Benito slammed shoulder-first into his knee. The demon half-turned, and I hit the other knee sideways. Both huge legs went out from under the demon, left him blind and falling.

Half a ton of demon slammed into the rock.

Billy rolled away. The demon moaned and tried to gather his knees to his chest.

"Now run!" cried Benito. *"Billy!"*

A troop of demons was almost on us. I raced for the next pit, stopped at the edge. Where was Billy?

Billy had retrieved the demon's pitchfork and was raising it for the kill.

I yelled, "Never mind that!" and then it was just too late. Billy yelled triumph and brought the pitchfork down hard. He raised it for another thrust, and they had him. I jumped into space alongside Benito. Three-inch fingernails clicked shut behind my neck.

XXI

THE SIDE of the gully was rough rock falling almost sheer. I glimpsed it in free fall, and when I saw that there were no handholds I simply gave up. A couple of seconds later I lay broken at the bottom, staring up at the non-sky.

In the sea of pain I couldn't tell what was broken and what was only bruised. But I remembered that you're not supposed to move an accident victim. I didn't try to move.

Rustling near me. "Benito?"

"Over here."

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes."

"Me too."

"We are out of their path, I think. We need only wait to heal."

Whose path? I was afraid to turn my head, but I turned my eyes. I found myself looking up along the fluted robe of a life-sized golden statue. No information there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I said, "What about Billy?"

"Poor Billy. His urge to violence betrayed him."

"Don't be so damned philosophical. We've got to get him out of their hands!"

"How?"

"Well . . . first we wait to heal, I guess. Where would they put him? In the pitch with the Tammany types?"

"Look up along the edge of the gully."

Something like an endless length of rope was falling in loops across the sky. It dropped very slowly, as if almost weightless. As it came near I saw that it was thicker than rope, and there was a tuft on the end . . . Where had I seen something like that recently?

Above our heads it hesitated, then descended like a blind worm. For seconds it was hidden behind the rock slope. Then it began to rise . . . and the end was coiled around something that moved. Billy.

"Minos," I said. "It's his tail."

"Yes."

Before we could move, Billy would be back on the island in the river of blood—or in the river itself; he'd left the island of his own free will. He was beyond our reach. I sighed and turned my eyes from the tiny struggling figure and the infinite sprawl of Minos' tail.

And the statue had moved.

It had gone past me by about one yard. I turned my head, regardless of consequences. My neck wasn't broken. And there were two bare human feet beneath the hem of the golden robe. One moved a good six inches as I watched.

"Benito. There are men in those things."

"And women too," said Benito. "Religious hypocrites."

He stood up carefully, testing to see if everything had healed. Apparently it had. He tried to help me up, but pain yelped in my ribs. I sat down against the slope to wait some more.

Golden robes moved past like snails. There were men and women in those golden idols, but I saw only bare feet and shadowed faces within enormous hoods. One stopped, and turned with the same excruciating slowness that characterized his walk, and said, "Are you lost?"

Benito said we weren't. I asked, "Are you?"

"Why, no. I think this is my proper place." His accent was thick and hard to identify. "I have been here long enough to be convinced that God thinks so too."

"How long is that?"

"Over a thousand years have passed on Earth, I'm told."

"That's a little hard to swallow," I said. "The English language isn't that old."

"I know," said the priest. "We teach each other. I learned this language from one who came here recently, an Amie Semple MacPherson. There is little else to do as we wander this endless channel, and you may imagine that it is easier to teach each other than to search for some companion who speaks our own language."

"Why," I asked, "don't you stop and sit down?"

The tired grey eyes studied me from within the golden cowl. "I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could fall on you. But it may be that you do not know what you say. If I stop this robe grows hot. It is too hot now. It grows hot slowly and it grows cool slowly. Now, goodby." He began to turn away.

Benito said, "We could walk along with you."

"That would please me." He finished his turn and took one lurching footstep.

I got up. The ruined ribs only twinged. "How heavy is that robe?" I asked.

"I never weighed it. They tell me it is gilded lead. Perhaps a ton?"

"What did you do?"

"Does it matter? I was young, I had not been a priest for many years. But the end of the thousand years since Christ was born were drawing to a close. People began to fear the end of the world. I urged them to give away their property. To the Church. We became very wealthy."

"You could have given it back, afterwards."

"We did not."

"Did all of you end up here? The whole Order?"

"No. Some truly thought the world would end. Some believed a wealthy Church could serve souls better. But I never believed the Second Coming could be predicted, and I enjoyed the wealth. I—do you need to know more? It was a good thing to be in the Church in those days."

Benito tapped my shoulder and pointed. "There is our way out. The rubble from the bridge."

It had been a bridge, high and arching like those we'd crossed before. Now it was a sloping pile of shattered rock. I looked at it curiously, but it didn't seem different from any other rock I'd seen, and I could see that normal laws of material strength didn't hold down here. It wasn't a surprise.

"What happened to it?" I wondered. "Earthquake?"

"I am told that all Hell shook at the moment of Christ's Death," said the ex-priest.

"So says Dante," Benito added. "Afterward, He came to Hell, and threw down the great gate in the wall of Dis."

"He must have been mad about something. I suppose being crucified could do that to you."

"I would be less flippant, Allen. Look around you." Before I could answer, Benito had started climbing the ruined bridge.

It was still a ridiculous picture. Christ was supposed to be gentle. Using a whip on the temple money-changers was one thing; behaving like a comic book hero was something else. I tried to imagine the bleeding, wounded, near-naked Figure ripping those tremendous iron gates from their hinges, while the halo flamed angrily about His Head—

Then gave it up and climbed up after Benito. I tested each foothold, but some of the slabs slid down anyway.

Near the top the rockslide ended, and we climbed by fingerholds and toeholds. There it was that I had to repress a sudden, violent urge to giggle.

Benito wouldn't have appreciated it. But—no wonder Christ was so upset.

Some clerk must have tried to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand Him Form D-345t839y-4583.

* * *

The seventh pit was enormous. I stood at the end of the bridge and marvelled at the thin fairy-span arching across. Carbon steel wouldn't have taken the stress; yet it was made of stone without mortar, like the fallen bridge behind us. Another miracle, and so what?

We started across.

It was dark down there. What I could see had a vaguely reptilian flavor to it: constant slow slitherings, and sudden flurries of violent motion.

Benito pulled at my arm. "Why do you dawdle, Allen?"

"Who are they?"

"Thieves. Theft is the most profitable of sins, and very popular. Tell me, Allen, do you expect to see anything down there that pleases you?"

He had me there. I didn't. But—"I'm a writer. I've got ten men's curiosity. What's the hurry? Are we in danger here?"

"I remind you that we are fugitives."

I stared in astonishment. "Geryon could have stopped us. Minos could have stopped us. They didn't."

"The demons behind us would have. Oh, very well, Allen. The real danger is at the next pit. We must cross that quickly."

"Okay." And I looked down again.

Reptilian, yeah. There were men and women down there . . . and lizards ranging in size from Chihuahua to Great Dane, and snakes whose range was even greater. I watched a tiny scarlet lizard leap from a crack in a rock to bite a man on the neck. The man burned like flash paper, dazzling me. When I looked again he was congealing from a cloud of smoke.

Benito was watching me, not them. Let him wait.

The land was strewn with rocks of all sizes. A stout grayhaired woman came toward us, running a tortuous path, her eyes fixed on her path. It didn't help. Somehow she stepped between two rocks and fell sprawling, yelling in despair. The python that had been following her caught up as she tried to run on the ruined foot. It climbed her leg and bit her on the navel.

Woman and snake, they lay immobile. They began to change.

"Allen—"

I made a shushing gesture. They were changing, the snake sprouting arms and legs and head hair, the woman melting into a smooth limbless shape. Presently there was nothing left of the woman.

The slender man who had been a snake stood up smiling. "Thanks, Gladys," he said, and walked away.

"He stole her shape," I said. "I'll be buggered. He stole her shape!"

"She will grow it back. In life she was probably a buyer of stolen goods, what do you call it? A fence."

"Yeah. Wow."

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah."

I turned and followed him. Wow. He stole her shape. How does a science fiction writer explain that? A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

computer-drawn hologram? Could be. It was pretty dark down there. But I didn't believe it.

The bridge dipped. We climbed down. Benito turned left on the ledge between the seventh and eighth pits. Benito was clearly uneasy.

Interesting things were happening in the darkness on my left, but I looked into the darkness on my right, for the danger Benito expected.

It looked like a swarm of fireflies, or like a freeway seen from an airplane, or—

This aye night, this aye night,
Every night and all,
Fire and sleet and candlelight,
And Christ recieve thy soul.

Sleet I'd found in the Circle of Gluttons, and fire on the desert. Here at last was the candlelight: huge candle flames moving in darkness.

From the next bridge it was no clearer. Benito kept trying to hurry me along. "You will not see anything here. Are you so fond of Hell that you would linger?"

Slender flames moved down there in the yellow-and-black murk . . . and stopped. and clustered beneath us. I said, "Who are they, Benito?"

"Dante calls this the Bolgia of the Evil Counselors."

"That doesn't tell me a lot. And I still don't know what you're afraid of."

A voice answered from below . . . a voice with little of the human in it. It thrummed like a harp. It was coming from the tip of one of the huge flames. "He is afraid of his own homecoming."

I looked at Benito. He nodded, not looking at me.

"Come down!" one of the flames called to Benito. It was eerily compelling, that thrumming voice. The tip of the flame wavered, turned to me. "Throw him down, you, if you're an American! That's Mussolini! Benito Mussolini!"

Jolted, I turned to Benito. He shrugged.

Mussolini?

Another voice thrummed from the pit. "You *are* American. I know your accent. Do you understand? That's Mussolini! Throw the bastard down here where he belongs!"

"Who are you?"

"Does it matter? I approved the fire bombing of Dresden."

A British voice spoke from the flames. "And I led the mission. We may belong here, Yank, but so does that Eytie swine."

Benito was backing away. When I went toward him, he turned and ran. I caught him at the edge of the next pit and tripped him. He fell heavily to the ground and I sat on him. He was no match for me. "Mussolini!" I shouted.

"I pulled you out of a djinn bottle!" he protested.

"And led me here, deeper into Hell! I knew it all along!" Mussolini. What better choice for the Devil's agent, to wander through Hell corrupting souls already half corrupted? Hitler was probably loose too. If we'd run across him I'd have guessed earlier. I remembered all my syspicions, and all the unexplained things that had happened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the trip down. No wonder he could give orders!

Well, I knew who he was now, and I knew where he belonged. We were at the edge of the ninth pit, but I took him by the heels and dragged him back to the eighth. He thrashed like a fish. He clutched at rocks, and pulled a couple out of the ground, for all the good that did him.

The pit flamed beneath us with the crowd gathered to welcome Benito home.

I rolled him over the edge. He gave a low cry as he dropped. Before he struck bottom he burst into flame. His was very bright, brighter than most around him.

I turned and went on.

XXII

I WALKED until I had to stop, until the ground dropped away at my feet. There I stood like a machine whose program has run out. After all, where would I go?

Now I was utterly alone, with nobody to tell me about the geography of Hell, or warn me of the dangers—

—or make me go deeper into horror after horror when all I wanted to do was stop. Mussolini. Benito Mussolini, Il Duce of Italy. He hadn't even tried to deny it.

What an idiot I'd been. Why hadn't I recognised him, with that square massive jaw and high forehead? I remembered reading about him in history books. Benito Mussolini had escaped from his castle-prison in a glider flown by Hitler's Commando, Skorzeny, one of the most romantic figures of that war. No wonder Benito could fly a glider!

Mussolini the fascist. He invented fascism! Killer and leader of killers, thug, ally of Adolf Hitler . . . back to the anonymous flame, Mussolini, evil genius behind the Italian king. Down you go, Benito, who poured me from a bottle.

I stood there a long time before I realised what I was seeing.

In the ninth pit the damned staggered and lurched, slipping in bloody mud, leaving more blood to make the path more slippery for those behind. They seemed dazed survivors of some lost battle.

One showed no obvious wounds, except for his erect posture and painfully stiff walk. I stared at his face, where a macabre joke had been played. It was pale and lean, and calm; no one would have guessed that he was in pain; but the eyes burned with hate. The moustache was in an unfamiliar style, straight, but twice the width of his mouth. And the sharp white canine teeth protruding over his lower lip would have had anyone over the age of six shouting, "Vampire!"

Well ahead of him was a sturdy fat man with a striking bearded face and blood running from a cut throat. The face was familiar. I studied him, trying to remember where I'd seen that face.

He started back. Then he roared in fury wrapped in a Shakespearian accent. "Varlet! Who might you be, that stare so arrogantly at England?"

"Huh?" I shook myself. "Carp—Carpenter."

"Come down, woodworker, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I will have your eyes nailed shut!"

I realised I had been staring, rudely, at people who had trouble enough without that. More of Big Juju's victims. "Sorry. Does it help if I tell you the wounds will heal?"

I could see the shock rippling down the line, and suddenly they were all screaming curses and waving their fists. One man threatened with his severed arm held like a club.

"Dolt! Ass who mocks us!"

"What did I say?"

"You cannot be such a fool!" 'England' cried. "We are nearly healed now! We reach the point in the circle where—" He stopped, looking ahead, forgetting me entirely. "I see him now," he said in a voice without life or hope.

I looked. The bridge was ahead of them, and under it was a king-sized version of all the other demons we'd passed, twenty feet tall, carrying a slender sword. He grinned, showing teeth nearly a foot long.

I had to cross the bridge anyway. I walked toward the demon.

He was killing them. They marched toward him, hanging back when they could until others pushed them ahead, and he killed them. He picked a man up and sliced him from the crotch to the throat, set him down and let him walk on. Empathic pain lashed through me, and a line from a joke ran crazily through my head. About a cowboy who'd been thrown onto a barbed wire fence. He'd shown Texas courage; he'd remounted the horse and gone on. *Of course he had to let the stirrups out a little . . .*

The fat man looked sick and scared. His face clicked suddenly into place: a painting, very famous. Henry the Eighth.

I kept walking.

I was crossing the bridge when Henry reached the demon. The sword was not a sword, I saw now. It was an overdeveloped fingernail on an overdeveloped middle finger as thick as a strong man's thigh. It flicked like a rapier and severed Henry's head, and the demon handed Henry his head, and Henry walked on. The sharp horn tip of the sword flicked suddenly up before my face.

I stopped.

"Who may you be, O priveleged one, who run so free through Hell?"

I got my throat working. "Allen Carpenter."

"Where away, Carpenter?"

"I don't know. Inward." With all the feelings that had been burnt out of me, one was left. Curiosity. Whatever Benito had planned for me, it lay downward, inward.

The dead had stopped to wait, with understandable patience, for the demon to finish his conversation. I waved downward. "Who are they?"

The demon seemed in no hurry. "Sowers of discord. People who advocated hatred, started wars, refused to end wars—you know, the opposite of the peacemakers. This is a special collection. Religious schizmatics. Generally founded their own churches for their own purposes.

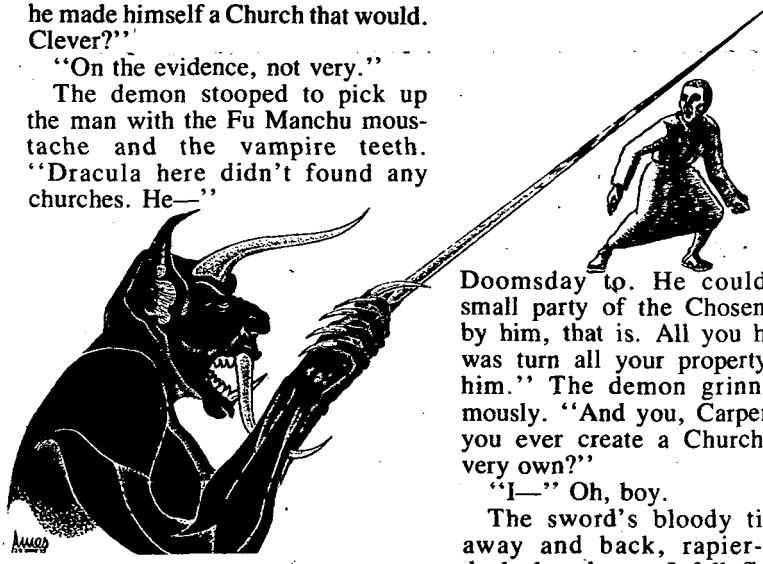
The demon looked fondly at "England's" receding back. "Henry there wanted a divorce. The Church wouldn't give him one. So

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he made himself a Church that would. Clever?"

"On the evidence, not very."

The demon stooped to pick up the man with the Fu Manchu moustache and the vampire teeth. "Dracula here didn't found any churches. He—"



"*Dracula*! I thought he was—Dammit, he *was* just a legend."

"There *are* legends about him. In his homeland, Transylvania, mothers still frighten their children with his name. Dracula was just a title. Means dragon. His real name was Vlad; they called him Vlad Tepes, Vlad the Impaler. He spent his whole life torturing and killing Turks in the name of Christ. About half the people he killed were his own subjects, by the way."

Small wonder Vlad the Impaler walked funny. A wooden stake was sticking two feet out of his anus. The demon didn't need his sword. He just pushed the stake up until it didn't show, set the man down, and let him walk on. Walking funny.

The demon picked up another. "Johann, here, was the only man God would reveal the exact time of Doomsday to. He could save a small party of the Chosen, chosen by him, that is. All you had to do was turn all your property over to him." The demon grinned enormously. "And you, Carpenter? Did you ever create a Church of your very own?"

"I—" Oh, boy.

The sword's bloody tip swung away and back, rapier-quick. I ducked and ran. I fell flat on the bridge as the sword flashed again. The demon couldn't quite get at me at that angle. But the arch of the bridge dipped low, there at the end.

I rose to sprint position, poised, took off. At the base of the arch the sword flicked toward me at knee height. I jumped it and kept running, right across and into the space above the next pit.

The side was steep. I hit once, and bounced, and hit the bottom very hard.

* * *

There was no unconsciousness in Hell. There was only pain and the awful strain of trying to draw a breath. Deep down behind the pain a tiny voice was saying, *You don't need to breathe, Carpentier. You're dead.* But I wanted to breathe, I needed to breathe and not a sip of air could I draw.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eventually the air did come, in sips, then gulps. I tried to straighten out. It felt as if I were breaking my own back. Maybe my back *was* broken. But the sword would have been worse.

Could I feel my feet? Yes.

Okay. Your spine's intact. Just lie here a while. It will heal. Sure, we always healed.

Hey, Carpentier. Why was it Benito always healed before you did? .

Why shouldn't he? He was one of the paid staff.

Then why did he get hurt at all?

A woman's voice said; "What've you got?"

"Uh?" I still couldn't get more coherent than that.

"What've you got?" she repeated patiently. I moved my head around, slowly. It was dark and gloomy. I became aware of hideous screeching sounds, moans, screams of pain and rage, snarling dogs, the cacaphony of Hell.

She was sitting against the sloping side of the trench, naked, her body marked with pustules and the scars of older eruptions of the skin. She didn't seem more able to move than I was.

But the pain in my back was easing. I said, "Broken back, probably. What've *you* got?"

"Everything. Syphilis. Gonorrhea. Yaws. Trench mouth. Everything you can think of."

"Uh huh. I know what *you've* been doing."

She wailed, "But I *didn't!* That's why it's so unfair!"

My eyes were getting accustomed to the gloom that hung thick down here in the pit. There were others lying about the floor and the sides of the gully. Most of them looked deathly ill.

Across from me was a man scrabbling among thousands of pills. There must have been every variety of medication ever invented or imagined: tablets, capsules of many hues, bottles of liquids, tiny pills and pills that would choke a horse. He groaned in pain as he held up a pill and squinted at it. Finally he decided: he flung the pill back into the bathtub of them next to him.

He sat for a moment. Then he moaned, pressing his hands hard against his belly. "It's eating me alive!" he screamed. He scrabbled for another pill. This time he gulped it without looking at it. It didn't seem to help, because he screamed even louder and went back to his inspection routine.

I looked a question at the girl. She shrugged. "He sold cancer cures. They only worked if you didn't go to a doctor. Somewhere in that pile there may be a pill that cures him."

"What about the rest?"

"Some don't do anything. Some make it worse."

I shuddered, then froze as something came howling past on all fours, foam dripping from its jaws. I'd thought it was an animal, but it wasn't. It was a man.

"Counterfeiters. Counterfeiters always get rabies," said the woman. "If they bite you it takes a long time to heal."

And I couldn't move! There was nothing to do but watch.

Men and woman with peeling scabs and an itch that drove them to tear at themselves. A man with no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ears, unable to move and screaming for water.

"Listen!" he shouted. "Tell Satan! Anyone! Tell Satan there is a plot to overthrow him. For water I will reveal the names of the plotters! Tell him!"

They were all deathly ill and they were all in pain—

—except one, and he was startling by contrast. He sat against the slope of the gully, a few feet from the girl and across from me. A middle-aged cherub, comfortably overweight, his blue eyes twinkling above a mad and happy smile.

Certainly he was mad. Was it a sickness of the mind, or had some vile bacterium reached his brain?

I had to get out of here. The most ferocious contagious diseases ever to wrack mankind were all around me. I tried to move, and stopped at once. My legs wouldn't obey, and it felt as if my spine were being twisted in a vise. Had I caught something already? Spinal meningitis, maybe?

The madman's wandering blue eyes found me. He said, "I was a psychiatrist."

"I didn't ask." In fact, I'd already learned more of Hell than I really wanted to know. I only wanted out. *Don't tell me any more!* I closed my eyes.

"They trusted me," the mad voice said happily. "They thought we knew what we were doing. For fifty bucks an hour I listened to their life stories. Wouldn't you?"

He subsided. The woman said, "He's crazy."

"Thanks. I really wondered about that," I told her without opening my eyes.

"Listen, you fell in over the edge. Have you been upslope? Have you seen a lot of what's up there?"

"A lot."

"What do they do to, shall we say, ladies of the evening?"

I opened my eyes. She was tense, waiting for my words.

"I didn't notice anything special for whores. Why?"

"I, I . . . Listen, some girls don't actually sleep with the customers. They take a gentleman to a mote, they get their money in advance, then they disappear. Sometimes you can do better than that. You're just getting down to business when your boy friend walks in the door. You see?"

"Sure." I'd been robbed that way a couple of times in England.

"Well," she said, "you'd think that wouldn't be as bad as being an actual . . . prostitute." And she looked at me.

Somehow the memory was very dim now, of a time on Earth when a London girl had propositioned me, taken my money, and vanished from a bathroom with an unsuspected second door, leaving me in rage and frustrated lust. If I'd caught her I'd have killed her. But that was long ago, and nothing looked bad next to where I was now.

So I lied. "They'd be downslope from here. I haven't been there yet."

Satisfied, she sank back and forgot me in the examination of her ruined body.

The mad psychiatrist noticed me again. "We were just playing," he said dreamily. "Tinkering with something we didn't understand. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew. Oh, I knew. Let me tell you—''

''Don't tell me.'' They kept hurting at me, all of them!

''He was a catatonic. He was like a rubber doll. You could put him in any position and he'd stay there for hours. We tried all sorts of things in those days. Shock therapy, insulin shock, lobotomy. Punish the patient for not noticing the outside world.''

''Or for not noticing you.''

I meant it to hurt, but he nodded happily. ''So we put him in a hot box and started raising the temperature. We watched him through a window. First he just sweated. Then he started to move around. At a hundred and thirty he said his first words in sixteen years. *'Get me the fuck out of here!'* ''

The mad eyes found me, and his face seemed to cave in. The cherubic smile vanished. Urgently he said, ''Get me the fuck out of here!''

''I can't. I'll be lucky to get out myself.'' I tried moving again. There was pain, but not enough to keep me in that place. I stood, gingerly, and started up the slope.

The girl cried, ''You can't do that! Come back here! Come back!''

I kept going. There were rocks to pull myself up, cracks to use as footholds. I'd climbed just far enough when another hydrophobia case raged past, biting and chewing on everyone he passed. A rock rolled from beneath my foot and pain grated in my spine as I caught myself.

The rabid man screamed at the psychiatrist, but the cherubic look had returned and he was smiling dreamily at the opposite wall. When I reached the top I remembered who had been in the last pit of the Eighth Circle. Frauds. Falsifiers. False witnesses.

XXIII

THAT WAS THE LAST of the Bolgias. Now the way led across an empty, rocky land. I turned and looked at the ten canyons rising upward behind me, light flickering from some, others marked by rising smoke or roiling heated air. It had not been a pleasant journey.

Far ahead, through a twilit gloom that would just have had drivers turning on their headlights, I saw what seemed a cluster of great towers. There was nothing else to see, nothing at all.

Benito's evil counsel had brought me this far. Now it was too late. I could get back a little way, probably to the fifth pit, possibly as far as the cliff. But I'd never talk Geryon into taking me up that cliff . . . and there were just too many places where Allen Carpenter might belong.

Could I talk the monster into summoning Minos? That could get me all the way back to the Vestibule. Yeah, and into the bottle again. If I were lucky. I hadn't forgotten that burrowing this far into Hell might be a crime in itself. Minos had told me that I could choose far worse for myself than ''justice''. Maybe I'd already made the choice.

Or . . . I could just sit down. In this empty borderland I could spend a good piece of eternity before some angel noticed me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I sat down.

It was very peaceful.

It was, in fact, the only completely empty spot I'd seen in Hell. Why? Maybe it was reserved for some brand new sin, something that hadn't been invented yet . . . say, a development of brain research or genetics. At some time in the indefinite future I might have to vacate fast.

Meanwhile, it was better than the bottle. I could see my navel.

Time passed without leaving footprints. Days, I think. The stinks of Hell were still in my nostrils. The ever-present background noise might have been soothing if I hadn't known what it was: millions of moans and cries blended by distance. But nobody was hurting me or hurting at me. I didn't have to watch people getting sliced up, or burned, or riddled by diseases, or smashed by demon cars, or distorted into obscene shapes.

I sat and dreamed of the past. I wondered idly about the looming towers I could see in the dark distance. I wondered at Benito's ultimate purpose in luring me here. But none of it seemed to matter. I thought that even curiosity had been burned out of me.

That would have been nice. I would have liked to turn my mind off for a long time. But it wouldn't turn off. Whatever quiet I'd found here, there was still Hell around me, and I hurt with the need to know why.

God had created human souls; could he not uncreate the failures? God had created sleep; could he not put the failures to sleep, forever? There were no good excuses for Hell. I thought of some unsettling bad ones:

The universe would fly off its axis if Hell's agony did not balance Heaven's bliss.

Or: part of Heaven's bliss was the knowledge that lots of nasty people were suffering terribly.

Or the old standby: we were in the hands of infinite power and infinite sadism.

I got restless. The towers kept catching at my eye: blurred grey shadows on the horizon. Skyscrapers? A city in Hell? Quarters to house the maintenance crew for Infernoland? Or were they the true entrance, the tourist entrance?

But I was only playing with plots. I didn't believe in Infernoland any more. This was Hell, and I knew it. I finally realised what was really bothering me.

To all intents and purposes I was back in the bottle.

I got up. I walked toward the towers. No harm in looking.

* * *

They weren't towers.

They were giants, enormous humanoids, buried in the earth from the navel down. I stopped well out of their reach to study them. Their enormous eyes found me and pinned me to the landscape like a butterfly on a board; then shifted away. I was not worth their attention.

I was glad. Unreasonably I felt that those tremendous deep eyes could see everything there was to know about me.

One was mad. He looked down at me hopefully and said, "Ildurb fistenant imb?" His face fell when I did not respond. Alien language,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alien being. What were these aliens doing in human Hell?

Not serving Big Juju. Not hardly. Miles of chain bound their arms to their sides.

There were giants in the Bible, and Titans in mythology. But no archeologist had ever found human bones this size. And how could they survive Earth's gravity? The square-cube law should have flattened them into mountains of hamburger.

Maybe they weren't from this universe at all. An attacking army from another universe made by another Creator? The science fiction writer in me, the late Allen Carpentier, wanted very much to see their legs and feet. They must be disproportionately large and sturdy to support their weight . . . unless they had developed in a lighter gravity field . . .

While Carpentier the trapped damned soul was examining the chains that wrapped another of the giants.

For the giants were buried just outside a chin-high wall: their chins, not mine. The wall looked too smooth to climb. I walked up to the chained giant, ready to jump, but it wasn't necessary. The chain looked like anchor cable. Whoever had wrapped it round him had a fine eye for detail. He'd have been lucky to shrug his eyebrows.

Now, what would Benito have done here? Climbed the giant, of course.

The thought of climbing such a monster gave me pause. Yet I was sure I could do it. Up the chain, stepping in the links, as far as his shoulder; beware of snapping teeth. Then onto the wall and down.

If Benito had told the truth . . . if what I remembered of Dante was true . . . I would then be in the last Circle of Hell, the Circle of Traitors. Traitors to nation, to overlord, to benefactor, to parents and siblings. A great ice plain, and the traitors embedded in it. There would be nothing but the cold to stop me from crossing it, and I knew I couldn't freeze to death.

It looked so easy. What had Benito left out?

I remembered the great ice plain well enough. The college boy had been jolted at finding part of Hell already frozen over. Benito hadn't said anything that jarred with my own memories of Dante.

But there had to be a joker in the deck somewhere. Benito had been a power in Hell. He'd given orders to others of Hell's minions. He'd demonstrated demonic strength against a tank of a man in the great swamp.

Carpentier, why didn't he do that to you?

Maybe it was guilt that stopped him. He'd writhed and torn at the ground, but he hadn't actually hit me, not once. He'd uprooted jagged rocks while trying to use them as anchors, but he hadn't tried to hit me with them. And for all his presumed safe-conduct, he was back where Minos had sentenced him, with the Evil Counselors.

Maybe Satan or God or Big Juju had rendered some kind of judgement against Benito. With me as the agent.

But *why hadn't Benito fought?*

The giant tried to shake himself. The chains barely rustled.

No danger there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You writhe and you struggle, but there's no way around it. Me too, giant. From every possible direction it looked the same. It was going to be unreasonably easy for Allen Carpenter to enter the Circle of Traitors . . . the place of punishment for those who had betrayed their benefactors.

I thought it over for a long time. Then I turned and started back.

XXIV

GOING BACK was harder. The dip at the lower end of the tenth bridge was steeper, and now I was climbing it. I crossed the pit without looking down, and climbed backward down the high end of the bridge.

I saw the next bridge close by, and made for it.

A sword's point flicked up before my eyes. I stopped. Surely he'd been under a different bridge? I'd shewed my path deliberately. But a half-human, half-bestial head beyond the sword's point shook itself negatively.

"You can't go back, Carpenter."

"I have to."

The blade hung before me, rock-steady. I could have chinned myself on it. I half-stepped forward and the blade moved too fast to follow. Now it pricked the tip of my nose.

I shrugged and turned back.

I took no chances. I crossed the inner pit again and circled through the wasteland beyond. Two bridges away, I crossed again—on my belly. I slid down the high end of the bridge and kept crawling along the ridge above the ninth pit. He couldn't be under *all* the bridges.

Couldn't he just. Like the damned clerk. He was waiting when I tried to stand up. At this; the low side of the pit, he had the angle on me. "You can't go uphill," he said. "I really don't know how to make it plainer."

"I'm from the Vestibule," I said. "I don't belong here."

"You never created your own Church, Carpenter?"

Oh, dammit! "Listen, those weren't in competition with God or anybody! All I did was make up some religions for aliens. If that was enough you'd have every science fiction writer who ever lived!"

"We've got *him*," said the demon, and he pointed with the sword.

I forgot the sword entirely. I leaned far out over the edge of the pit to see. "What in Hell—to coin a phrase—is that?"

It was, in a sense, the last word in centaurs. At one end was most of what I took for a trilobite. The head of the trilobite was a gristly primitive fish. It's head was the torso of a bony fish . . . and so on up the line, lungfish, proto-rat, bigger rat, a large smooth-skinned beast I didn't recognise, a thing like a gorilla, a thing like a man, finally a true man. None of the beasts had full hindquarters except the trilobite; none had a head except the man. The whole thing crawled along on flopping fish-torsos and forelegs and hands, a tremendous unmatched centipede. The human face seemed quite mad.

"He founded a religion that masks as a form of lay psychiatry. Members try to recall previous lives in their presumed animal ancestry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They also recall their own past lives . . . and that adds an interesting blackmail angle, because those who hear confession are often more dedicated than honorable. Excuse me."

For the line of victims had bunched up while we talked. The demon turned and sliced at them rapidly, to a tune of screams and curses. The centaur creature he sliced into its seperate components, and it went past him in a parade, on arms and forelegs and wriggling fishy fins. The sword flicked up again just as I'd decided to make a break for it.

A bead of blood formed at the tip of my nose. "I'm not like him," I said quickly. "He played the game for real. With me it was just a game." I backed away until the tenth Bolgia was an emptiness beneath my heels. He couldn't reach me now. "Take the Silpies. They were humanoid, but telepaths. They believed they had one collective soul, and they could prove it! And the Sloots were slugs with tool-using tentacles developed from their tongues. To them, God was a Sloot with no tongue. He didn't need a tongue; He didn't eat, and He could create at will, by the power of His mind." I saw him nodding, and was encouraged. "None of this was more than playing with ideas."

The demon was still nodding. "Games played with the concept of religion. Enough such games and all religions might look equally silly."

"You can't do this!" I shouted. "Listen, there's a friend of mine in the Eighth Bolgia, and it's my fault he's there, and I've got to get him out!"

"Did anyone promise you it would be easy? Or even possible?"

"Whatever it takes," I said, and thought I meant it.

"Step closer."

I walked to the edge. Carpentier shows his good faith.

The sword flashed twice. I heard and felt the tip grate along my ribs. It left two vertical slashes along my chest and belly. I reeled back with my arms wrapped around myself to hold my guts in.

The demon was watching me steadily. What could he be waiting for?

I knew. I stepped forward and dropped my arms. Carpentier shows his inability to learn.

The sword flashed twice more, leaving two deep horizontal slashes, perhaps mortally deep. A living man would have fainted from shock. I couldn't.

"Games," said the big evil humanoid. "Your move."

I studied the slashes and the flowing blood. Shock did seem to be slowing down my thought processes, but presently I saw what he meant. I said, "What do I use for a pencil?"

"You'll think of something."

I studied my fingernails. I thought of something.

I gouged a ragged X in the top left square of the diagram. The sword flashed to place an O in an adjacent corner.

* * *

I climbed the first slope of the bridge on fingers and toes. When I could walk I held my arms wrapped around myself, holding me in. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pride of my victory seemed excessive for a stupid game of tic-tac-toe.

As I left the bridge I heard him call, "Carpenter?"

I turned my head.

"Best two out of three?"

My imagination was dead of shock. The only dirty word I could think of was one I'd never use again, not after seeing the place of the flatterers. I just kept walking along the rim.

The eighth pit was a canyon filled with firelight. "Benito!" My voice echoed hollowly between the canyon walls. "Benito!"

Some of the flames wavered. Thrumming voices, retarded by the transfer from voice to flametip, floated upward.

"Leave the damned to suffer alone."

"Benito who?"

'Bug off, you!"

The canyon stretched endlessly away in both directions in a gentle curve. If it was a full circle, it could hold millions. How was I to find Benito?

"Benito!" There was panic in my voice. The strain hurt my slashed chest. "Benito!"

"Benito Mussolini? He just passed me going *that* way—"

"No, it was the other direction."

"You're both wrong. Mussolini's in the boiling lake."

A fat lot of help I'd get here. And if I found him, what then? How was I going to get him out?

How did he get out in the first place? Maybe he'd already left again. A frustrating thought, because I couldn't do a thing about it, and it would mean I'd played my game with the demon for nothing. I hoped Benito was already out, but I had to assume he was still in there.

The canyon wasn't all that deep. What I needed was a climber's rope. Yeah, an asbestos one, stupid! Benito was on fire! For that matter, I hadn't seen any ropes anywhere.

I thought for a second about the chain on the giant. It would mean passing the demon twice—

No. Even if I got the chain loose, it was too heavy to move, and the freed giant would probably crush me for my trouble. I was glad I didn't have to decide to face the demon's sword again. I don't know what I would have done.

Well? *Think, Carpentier! There are tools in Hell. Sure, boats carry rope. Now we're getting somewhere. A heavy rope, kept wet while Benito climbs—Wait a minute. How do we climb the cliff when there's no rope yet? There haven't been any boats since the gaudy alien Geryon took us down. Tackle Geryon again?*

And if it doesn't work, back in the bottle while Benito burns?

Benito was smarter than I was. Maybe he'd think of something. "Benito!"

Mocking, thrumming voices answered.

I thought of fourteen feet of sword blade attached to a twenty foot demon. Disable the demon (with what?), cut the blade loose (how?), send it down to Benito. But could he climb something that sharp? Or would he lose his fingers immediately? Did fingernail burn?

Waitaminute! There were smaller demons, higher up, carrying iron pitchforks!

I made for the bridge. In a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

steps I was running. If I slowed down I'd want to stop, because I was terrified of what I planned.

I was in too much of a hurry. I was trotting toward the base of the tremendous bridge over the chasm of thieves when something flashed scarlet from behind a rock. I turned, frowning . . .

. . . and there was agony, flashing out from my neck to engulf me and drown me. I felt my bones soften and bend.

The pain drew back like a broken wave receding, but it left a blackened mind. I was confused; I couldn't think. A homely bearded man bent over me, saying urgent words that made no sense.

"Which way is out?" He was huge, I realised. A giant. I stepped toward him—and I was tiny and four-legged; my belly scraped the ground. A lizard. I was a lizard.

The bearded man repeated himself, enunciating each word. "Which way is out? How can I leave Hell?"

Vengeance. I advanced on him. Bite the son of a bitch! He backed away, still talking, but I couldn't understand him.

He stopped and seemed to brace himself.

I leapt. I sank my teeth into his belly. He howled, and I dropped to the ground, writhing in new agony.

When my mind cleared I was a man. I rolled away fast from the red lizard and didn't stop until there was a rock between us. The lizard stayed where he was, watching me.

I was making for the next bridge when his words came back to me. My dumb reptile brain had registered them only as sounds.

"You can't speak!" he'd wailed. Then, "Tell me! I'll let you bite me, but tell me the way out!"

He was a scarlet splash on a gray rock. Still watching me.

I pointed downslope, toward the lake of ice. "There! All the way to the center, if I haven't been lied to myself!"

I glanced back once after I'd crossed the next bridge. The lizard was poised on the rim, staring down. As I watched, he made his decision. He leapt into the pit.

Now what was that all about? *Never mind, Carpentier, you've got other concerns . . .*

XXV

FAR BELOW ME, the golden monks stood like so many statues. Every couple of seconds one or another would rock forward as if its base were unstable. The broken bridge dropped in a cascade of rock.

I stopped to catch my breath (Habit, Carpentier! You could give that up), then went down the broken slope with some care. It would have been easy to break an ankle.

I had reached the floor of the canyon before I noticed that one of the monks had turned completely around to stare at me. His slate-grey eyes were the oldest, the weariest I had ever seen; and I recognised them.

He said, "Didn't you pass here a week ago?"

"A few days, I think. And you've only come this far?"

"We hurry as fast as we can." The grey eyes studied me. They were so tired; they made me want

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to sag down and rest. "May I ask, what game are you playing? Are you a courier or something equally unlikely?"

"No. I—" Why not tell the truth? He wasn't about to run tell someone. "I've got to steal a pitchfork from one of the ten-foot demons in the next pit over."

"Don a cloak like mine," he said. "See what it does to your sense of humor."

I sank down against the bank. Those tired eyes . . . "I'll wear the cloak," I said. "You get Benito out of the Pit of the Evil Counselors. Okay?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I pushed a good friend into the Pit of the Evil Counselors. If I can't—"

"But why would you do a thing like that?"

I howled. It startled me more than him. I'd been about to say something else entirely. But no words came, and I threw back my head and howled. The tears streamed down my face.

The monk said something in a foreign language. He tottered toward me, and stopped. He didn't know what to do. "There, there," he said. "It will be all right. Don't cry." With a touch of bitterness he added, "Everyone will notice."

There was a howl as big as the world inside me. It wanted out, and it was stronger than I was. I howled.

The priest muttered to himself. Aloud he said, "Please. Please don't do that. If you will only stop crying, I will help you get your pitchfork."

I shook my head. I got out a whimpered, "How?"

He sighed. "I cannot even take off my robe. I do not see how I can help. Perhaps I could act as bait, somehow?" He lifted his head, his teeth grinding with the effort, to look up along the cascade of broken rock.

I stood up. I patted him on his leaden back: *Clunk, clunk, clunk.* "You've got your own problems." I girded up my mental loins and started up the slope.

Loose rocks rolled under my feet. This was the high side of the gully. It took a long time to get to the top. I had just one advantage: part of the bridge still projected out from the cliff. I climbed in its shadow and stopped underneath. I waited.

After all, what could a demon do to me? Rip me to pieces? I'd heal.

Drop me into the pitch, forever?

Throw me into the pit of the thieves?

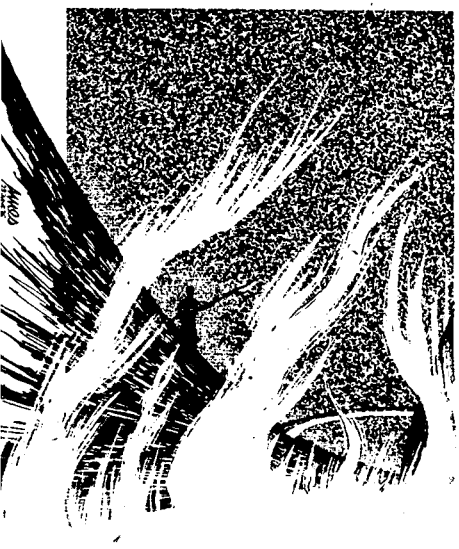
One of the horned black demons strolled past, his head turned to study the pitch on the other side of the ridge. He held six yards of iron pitchfork balanced in one hand. All I had to do was leap out and grab it.

I let him go. When he was past I began to shake. The beast had three-inch claws, ten. And eight-inch tusks, two. And Carpentier was a coward.

I heard clanking and puffing below me. I turned and saw an amazing sight. The priest was coming up behind me.

I watched him. I didn't believe it, but it was true: he was actually in motion. He sounded as if he were dying again, but every so often his hand or his foot would move and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



he'd be two inches higher. When I finally made myself believe what was happening, I scrambled down the cliff, got under him and pushed up on the rigid hem of his robe. I doubt it helped. I might as well have been trying to lift the world.

We reached a flattish fragment of rock just under what was left of the bridge. There we rested. The death rattle was in his throat. His eyes were closed. His face glistened.

"Thousand years," he got out. "Been walking . . . thousand years . . . in this lead coffin. Legs like trees." Then, "Was a priest. A priest. Supposed to . . . keep people *out* of Hell."

"I still don't know how we're going to do it." The *we* was courtesy, and he deserved it. But what could he do?

"Get me up," he said.

I got my arms under his robe. It was warm. Together we got him upright, somehow. Then I looked up . . . at a demon's hooves.

The demon looked down at us, grinning. "You know," he said pleasantly, "you're the first one ever got this far out of the tar."

I said, "You're making a mistake. 'I'm not—" Then I leapt for it. The pitchfork struck sparks from the rock where I'd been, but I was in midair, falling.

I landed hard on a ragged-edged boulder. I rolled immediately, ready to dodge again.

The priest was gripping the business end of the pitchfork!

The demon bellowed and pulled. For an instant he had lifted the priest off the rock, robe and all. Then the priest sagged back, still gripping the tines.

I tried to climb up to help.

The priest took two steps back and off the edge of the rock.

The demon bellowed for help. He was trying to lift half a ton of leaden robe, and it wasn't working out. I had almost reached them when the demon cried out and let go. The priest dropped through space.

I crawled down to him.

The robe was bent like tinsel and cracked down the front. The edges glowed yellow. He'd been told wrong; the robe was solid gold. When I touched it it burned my fingers.

The priest was mangled inside. He looked violently dead, except for his eyes, which followed me. If I didn't get him out of the robe he'd fry. But you don't move an accident victim—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He'll heal, Carpentier. We all heal, to be hurt again. I pulled him out by his feet. The robe wasn't contoured to let him pass, but it didn't matter. He came out like a jellyfish. He must have broken every bone in his body.

I spoke not to the soft-looking head, but to the grey eyes alone. "You'll heal. When you heal, there's a way out of Hell. Benito says so. Go downhill. Downhill."

The eyes blinked.

"I've got to rescue Benito," I said. I pulled him over to the side so nobody would step on him. I picked up the pitchfork and left.

* * *

"Benito!"

I walked the ridge between the pits, calling like a lost soul. The answering voices all sounded the same, anonymous, thrumming, inhuman. "Here I am, fellah!" "Benito who?" "Who dares disturb the silence of Hell?"

"Benito!"

"Allen?"

That had to be him! But a dozen voices took it up. "Allen!" "Here I am, Allen! What kept you?"

"Benito! I've come to get you out!"

I listened for the Italian accent . . . and heard it. "Never mind. I belong here. I should not have tried to leave."

All the flames looked alike, but I thought I had him placed now. I reached down with the pitchfork. "Bu-ger that! Grab the end!"

The other flames were wandering off. Benito said, "It is not long enough in any case."

It wasn't. I looked along the rim. There was a rough place where I might climb down partway.

Benito tried to stop me. "You are being stupid. If you fall, you will burn like the rest of us!"

"Can you reach the end?"

"Go away, Allen. This is my proper place."

I was ten feet below the rim, and almost out of footholds. The pitchfork was heavy and awkward. I tried to go further, setting my feet very carefully.

"All right," Benito said suddenly. The huge flame moved to engulf the tines. I felt a feather touch on the haft, and the flame began to rise from the pit.

He called, "Can you hold me?"

I laughed with relief. "You don't weigh as much as an ounce! I could lift a thousand of you!" After all I'd been through, suddenly it was going to be easy.

The flame rose higher along the haft . . . and I felt the first warming of the metal.

* * *

I waited until I was sure I could filter the panic from my voice. Some of it may have got through anyway. "Benito? Hurry."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, never mind. Just hurry." I was afraid he'd let go.

The metal was uncomfortably warm.

It grew hot.

Down there where a huge flame was rising in dreamy sloth, the metal began to glow dull red. He wouldn't notice; his own bright flame would blind him to it. Up here it was too hot to hold, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

held on, my teeth clenched against the scream.

The scream grew bulky in my throat. I stopped breathing to hold it in. If Benito gave up now to save me pain, I'd never, never find the courage to do this twice.

The metal was cheery red around the flame. My hands began to sizzle. I wasn't breathing, but the smell of cooked meat worked its way into my nose. I couldn't imagine how my hands still held. I was clenching them with everything I had, but the muscles and nerves must be cooked through. Charred through. I knew that smell too: dinner ruined. My head was thrown back, my eyes clenched tight. There was no sensation but the fire.

"You can let go," said Benito. He was beside me, clinging to the cliff, his body no longer hidden by the flame.

I tried to let go.

My hands were charred fast to the haft. I tried to knock the pitchfork loose. It came loose, all right, and slid bumping into the eight Bolgia with my charred hands still attached.

Benito had to virtually lift me up the cliff.

XXVI

WE WENT INWARD. I followed Benito, nursing my charred wrists. He had to haul me up the last bridges by the slack of my robe. The pain never stopped. The nerves gave no sign of having been cauterized by the red hot iron. The charred bone broke away; the black flesh split to expose red flesh.

It'll heal, Carpentier.

Oh, *shut* up. And call me Carpenter. Carpentier the Famous Author is dead.

In the empty borderland between the tenth pit and the giants, we sat down. Presently Benito spoke. "Thank you."

"Yeah. I'm sorry I pushed you in."

He didn't say anything. I said, "I thought I had to do it. I thought it was *right*."

Still nothing. "Look," I said. "I was raised to believe that Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were identical monsters."

Benito sighed. "Sometimes, toward the end, perhaps we were. I didn't start that way. I meant well." He laughed, bitterly. "I had good intentions. We know what is said to be paved with those."

"Tell me about it."

He spoke musingly, without looking at me. "After the War I saw my country humiliated. No one believed in anything. Corruption everywhere, laboring people working against wealthy people, middle class working against the government, everyone fighting each other and everyone ruining each other. If they'd only work together—we were Romans, once. We ruled the world. We could be great again, instead of a joke for Clemenceau and Lloyd George to swat aside."

"So you made people work together?"

"I gave Italy hope. For years I even stopped Hitler from taking Austria. Allen, if I'd chosen the side of the Allies in the second war, would I have as great a place in history as Stalin?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I couldn't say anything to that.

"Yet he killed ten million peasants. Adolf never equalled that record. As for me, in the early days we used castor oil, not clubs." He sighed. "But you can never stop, once you begin seeing what is better for people than they know themselves. The opposition will make a thorough mess of everything you've done, and you know they will destroy the country. What do you do? Destroy the opposition. Now they really have grievances. Bigger opposition, more police needed to suppress them. But I meant well. I loved my people to the day they killed me."

" 'The purpose of power is power.' "

"*what*?" Benito was badly shocked.

"Never mind. Quote from a novel, *1984*. So then you tried to set up a government here?"

"For my sins, I did." Benito's sudden laugh was like my own howling in the sixth Bolgia: there was an agonized laugh in him, and it clawed its way through his throat. "Oh, Allen! And you think you've seen Hell! A government among the Evil Counselors—When I tried to get out they stopped me; they needed me as figurehead. Never mind, I got out anyway. I *had* to."

"But you never did anything but good for me. Or anyone else you met, down here."

"How are your hands?"

We looked. Two tiny infant's fists were forming at the lumpy bones of my wrists. "We must wait until they heal. You will never climb with those!" he laughed.

We sat and talked. Hours passed.

"I think the worst was when they shot my cabinet people. Italians, shooting men whose only crime was to love Italy and trust me—" he shuddered. "Those are strange scars on your chest."

"I had to play games with the demon in the tenth Bolgia. Funny, we didn't see him coming back."

"Games?"

Reluctantly I told him. It could have been embarrassing, but it wasn't. He didn't thank me again. Instead he smiled and said, "Do you still believe that Hell is a place of entertainment?"

"No. I didn't even then. I think Geryon convinced me."

"Geryon?"

"Yeah. You may not have noticed, but Geryon is the only nonhuman in Hell who really looks like an ET, an extraterrestrial, something from another world. He's consistent. Not like those patchwork demons, animal traits grafted on a human frame. And when I climbed aboard him I kicked machinery around his waist."

"So?"

I had to laugh. "Oh, *really*, Benito! An anti-gravity belt? When they've already proved they can take the mass and weight out of anything they like? Geryon was lying. Lying without saying a word."

"And it was Geryon that convinced you? You have seen no proper miracles?"

I told him where the pitchfork had come from. "That priest climbed the broken bridge in half a ton of gold. He hung from the demon's pitchfork until the demon had to let go, and he *knew* what would happen then."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Benito smiled. "Yes, that was a miracle."

"Too right. I know a miracle when I see one."

"Then you are more fortunate than most of us." He looked thoughtful. "Geryon has looked a little different each time I have seen him."

"That worried me too. Just how often have you made this trip?"

"Six times. Each has been easier for me, although not for the one who accompanied me to the exit. As I told you, it does not matter how many start. Only one leaves."

"And there really is a way out . . . There was a time when I thought you were just leading me into something more horrible. I'm still scared, but not of that."

"Now there remains only the lake of ice. You have nothing to fear."

"I'm afraid to relax. Too often I've thought I was through the worst part."

His look probed my soul. "When the iron began to grow warm in your hands—"

"Tell me all about it."

"I think not. But now there is only the ice. It will be colder than anything you can magine, but we can endure it. Nothing can bar us now! Soon we reach the center, and then—" He stopped.

"And then?"

"You will see." He looked me in the face. "I think you have enough courage."

"Even now I feel it leaking away. Spit it out, Benito."

"We will meet Lucifer, and pass him. Ignore anything he says. When we have passed that, go uphill to Purgatory." He paused. "Without me."

"But you've travelled this route? You know where it leads?"

"No, and yes. I have not traveled it, but I know where it leads."

"How?"

"By faith, and by Dante's description."

"Dante's been wrong a couple of times. Admit it, Benito: you don't know what happened to those six you rescued."

"I know. But I have not seen."

"Do you want to leave Hell? Or are you afraid of what's there?"

"How are your hands?"

They were a child's hands now, still too small to support my weight.

"You didn't answer my question."

"I would leave Hell if I could. I belong here, so long as there are lost souls to be rescued."

"You sent six men and women into the unknown, but you were afraid to go yourself."

He didn't answer, only looked at me.

I stood up. "Come on. My hands'll heal before we need them."

* * *

They healed.

We climbed the torso of a chained giant. It was easier than mountain climbing, and harder: mountains don't shake, mountains don't snap at you with teeth the size of medieval shields.

We stepped across space from the giant's shoulder to the flat top of a wall. From the wall I watched Benito slide down on the seat of his pants, if he'd been wearing pants.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A pity he hadn't found a better way down in six previous trips.

I slid after him.

Imagine one of the Great Lakes frozen over, seen on a moonless night. Maybe it looked like that. I'd never seen any of the Great Lakes. To me it was an ice skating rink for a society of teleports: bit enough to hold, say, one percent of a population of five billion. The wall behind me seemed arrow-straight; the dark ice, infinite.

A breath of a breeze whispered around us and leeched all the warmth from our massless souls. I stiffened with the shock, then crouched down and tried to shelter in my own arms.

Benito was standing. "That will not help. Nothing helps," he said patiently. "You must bear the cold."

If he could do it . . . I stood up, and closed my eyes tight against the soft, unreasonably cold breeze. Surely it was below freezing, *way* below freezing. How cold was it? If it could kill a man in minutes, or seconds, I'd never know it. I couldn't die.

"Benito? Burst into flame again for your good friend."

"I would if I could. My apologies, Allen." Benito took my arm. We walked.

It had certainly been worth asking.

Was it water ice we walked on? For all of me, it could have been dry ice, or frozen nitrogen, or something even colder.

I kicked something that cursed me without emotion. I tried to open my eyes. The wind's tears had frozen them shut. I pulled them open, painfully, with my fingers.

"Leave them open," Benito said, "and they will freeze open."

When the urge came to blink I fought it. Then there was no need, for my eyes would not close. I looked back at what I'd kicked. I said, "Sorry."

The face was handsome, photogenic, dignified in middle age, undignified in the way it grimaced and bent to the ice for shelter. Had I seen that face sometimes, on television? Maybe. The man was buried to his chin in the ice. At the sound of my voice he cried, "Wait! Are you american?"

"Aren't we all? I can't seem to find anything but."

The head called to another head sitting like a cabbage on the ice. "George! Maybe we can settle this now." It turned back to me. "Late american? Do you know anything about the ABM controversy?"

"Sure. Anti-ballistic missiles to knock down incoming missiles. The controversy was over whether to build the ABM system."

"Wonderful! All right, sir. George was a Democrat, and I was a Republican. The Democrats were against building the system. The Republicans were in favor of it. But which of us was right?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," I said. "Do you really have nothing better to talk about than that?"

"No!" the man I'd kicked said sharply. "We do not! One of us had to be right! So why are we both here?"

The cold wasn't just getting to me; it had gotten me. I wanted *out*, not conversation. I said, "Other crimes, maybe."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One of us was wrong," George said. "Senator Gates here thought the system was a waste of money, but he went along with his party. He—"

"It was more than a waste of money! It used up efforts we could have spent on a laser system! Sir, I've seen how accurate a laser defense system could be against incoming missiles. But politics dictated that I must support the ABM system. I went along."

"I don't know anything about the damned lasers," George said, "except they were highly experimental. Experimental weapons did a lot for the Nazis, didn't they?" He snorted contempt, then sneezed on the freezing air. "I was convinced that the ABM system was needed to defend the country against an atomic attack. But our party platform was in favor of military cutbacks. Officially, so was I."

"Now, sir," Senator Gates said to me, "we can't both have been wrong."

"I think I'm getting the picture. You both *thought* you were wrong."

". . . yes."

"And a mistake could wipe out the United States of America."

Neither answered.

"For what it's worth," I said, "we're still getting Americans in Hell. Corbett died much later than you."

"Thank you," said ex-Senator Gates, and they both turned their faces to the ice again.

"But you were both traitors in your minds."

"Thank you for your help," said George. It was a dismissal.

* * *

We walked with care, to avoid kicking heads. There were certainly enough of them. But now it was worse; here the dead had been buried supine, and we would have been stepping on faces.

Once I missed my step and came down hard on a human face. The ice across its eyes crackled under my feet, and I leapt back fast. "Sorry!"

"Thanks," I heard.

"Mistake."

"Thanks, oh, thanks," it said, weeping. "I haven't cried in years. The damned ice froze across my eyes and I couldn't cry. Thanks."

I felt awful. This was an awful place. "That's okay," I said. I bent and picked the remaining shards of ice from her eyes. "What'd you do?"

"I don't want to say."

"Okay."

I tore the ice visors from a couple of dozen pairs of eyes. Always they froze over again almost immediately. Only one ever said "Thanks." Finally I gave it up. There were just too many.

And the next head I passed screamed, "The ice! Stupid! Tear off the ice! You did it for the others!"

I stopped. "Who're you?"

"None of your business!"

I turned away.

"The ice! Wait! Al Capone, I'm Al Capone! You want names? That's Vito Genovese, trying to turn his face! Wait, I'll show you Lepke! Wait!" He was shouting against a chorus of voices trying to drown him out. I kept walking.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When the noise was behind us Benito said, "I knew Vito Genovese."

"Was he worth talking to?"

"No. Were you thinking of going back? It's cold, Allen."

Sound whispered all around us. Partly it was the breeze, which had stiffened. Partly it was the chattering of teeth. I'd suppressed that reflex in myself; it wasn't warming me at all.

But in all that expanse of ice, there was only one point of motion. I caught it in the corner of my eye, way off to one side. Doubted my senses. Kept looking. Saw it again.

'Benito?" I pointed.

He found it. "I had no idea. I thought I was the only one."

"You may be. It seems to be one man. And a dog."

They had noticed us, and they angled to meet us. As they came closer I saw my mistake. The dog was a lizard, its scarlet color leeched from it by the cold. And the man was the blackbearded thief who had stolen my shape at the seventh pit.

We studied each other. No greeting seemed appropriate. Finally I gestured and said, "Benito Mussolini. I'm Allen Carpenter."

"Jesse James. This lizard is Bob Ford."

"What was that all about, that business there at the bridge?"

"A bunch of us got together," said Jesse. "We thought maybe we could cooperate in getting one of us out. It turned out a man couldn't throw a lizard far enough. But we could stand a human pyramid against one of the walls, and the top man could throw a lizard at the bridge. I was the lizard."

"Funny nobody thought of it before."

He sighed. "It's getting those animals to work together, that's the problem. All the time we were trying to make the pyramid, some of us in the lizard form kept biting the ones in human form. We didn't get anything done till we had a dozen big lizards to guard us while we made the pyramid."

"Figures. Why'd you jump back?"

"I had to tell them which way was out."

"You might not have got out again. They might not even have let you take human form again."

He nodded.

I remembered something. A line from a song. 'It was little Robert Ford, that dirty little coward, I wonder how does he feel, for he ate of Jesse's bread, and he slept in Jesse's bed, and he laid Jesse James in his grave . . .' "Bob Ford. Didn't he kill you? Shot you while you were taking a bath?"

"Hanging a picture. Yeah, he shot me, all right. I was following your advice—for which I thank you, Stranger." He laughed. "And there was Bob Ford's head sitting on the ice. I thought it over for awhile. I wandered around and around him, wondering what I could do to him, and wondering if I still hated him."The lizard was rubbing affectionately against his leg. "I finally bit him on the nose."

It hit me like a stiff shot of good whiskey. "You can get out of the ice!"

"Sure, friend. I just reached into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that man-shaped bubble and picked up a lizard. Well, which way now?"

"Inward," Benito said. "Let us go. It is cold here."

That had to be the most unnecessary statement of all time. We moved inward, and the wind came up. It was blowing right in our faces. Pretty soon it was a real howler, as bad as the circle of the winds. I wondered if Corbett had ever got back there . . .

The wind whistled past us and lifted Jesse off the ice. The lizard squealed and leaped after him, and the wind caught it too. Man and lizard were bowled end over end across the ice, then lifted and flung high outward. I watched them dwindle.

"So close," I said. "They were so close!"

"They were not ready," Benito said. "Perhaps they must see what is done to others. Theft and treachery may not have been all they did. It is even possible that they will be blown all the way back to the Vestibule and must make their way back. Come."

"But—"

"They know the way, Allen. Come!"

"All right." We bowed our heads against the wind and staggered on. The wind had been entirely too selective for coincidence. It had thrown Jesse and Ford an unguessable distance without knocking me or Benito off our feet. I thought it was a good omen . . . for us.

XXVII

SUDDENLY THERE WERE no more heads. There was only the ice, and the wind that had blown the others away. We leaned into it and kept moving.

I said, "Hell has run out of sins?"

"Look down."

Hell had not run out of sinners. They were buried beneath the ice in weird positions. Once I looked down, and then no more.

We walked crouched, wrapped in our own arms, to no purpose. The wind had early sucked every erg of heat out of us.

I saw motion ahead, high up.

As we drew near a shadowy mass loomed around the suggestion of motion. Pterodactyls on a mountain? Restless, rhythmic motion, like the wings of enormous birds. And gradually it all came clear.

There was a humanoid form, a hairy torso more than a mile tall. We stood at the bottom, at waist level, and looked up at three vast faces whose features were almost lost in distance. Bat-wings flapped on either side of each face; and the wind was now beating down at our heads.

This was a very different picture from the dapper gentleman who offers to buy your soul. Or from Milton's epic hero, proud and unrepentant.

One could not imagine playing riddles or chess games with this hideous, miserable, helpless mountain. I studied it almost without fear.

All three pairs of jaws were moving in the same rhythm as the wings. Something fluttered around the lips . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Benito, what's he chewing on?"

"Are you sure you want to know?"

"Skip it. Which way is out? *Hey*—" I reached to stop him, not fast enough. Benito was striding straight toward Lucifer.

He stopped at the edge of the ice.

The ice ended short of Lucifer himself. There was three feet of empty space all around the enormous waist.

An no navel. I couldn't have missed it. It would have been big enough to hide a battleship.

"You must climb down," said Benito.

I looked into the gap. "After you."

He shook his head. "I cannot leave. There are others to rescue."

"I don't go without you."

"You have not shown such fear before."

"It's not all fear. You've rescued seven of us, now rescue yourself. You've earned it. If this doesn't lead to where you think it does, we can help each other get back."

"What if I turn back now, leaving you here?"

I'd wondered about that myself. "I don't know, and that's the truth. But there's a moral problem. You're a better man than I am—"

He smiled sardonically. "I? The murderous dictator you pushed into the eighth pit?"

"You've changed since you reached Hell. You've given *me* no evil counsel. I guess that's the point. If you haven't changed in Hell, if you haven't earned the right to leave, then I haven't and won't. If you can't go, I can't."

"I, I think I can go. I choose not to."

"If you can leave Hell, you'll have to prove it."

He studied my face . . . and then he smiled a joyful, luminous smile. He turned and stepped across the gap and had two fistfuls of coarse hair. And a sound beat down at our heads, a wind with an almost subsonic voice in it.

"Carpentier."

I looked straight up. Lucifer's middle face was looking down the curve of Lucifer's chest. Two fluttering human legs protruded like a ghastly cigarette from the corner of the mouth. It spoke, and the deep bass voice blew down to me.

"What will you tell God when you see Him?"

I didn't answer.

"Will you tell Him that He could learn morality from Vlad the Impaler?"

Benito was far below, clinging like a tick in the billowing hair, waiting for me. I stepped across and worked my way down. As I did, my weight seemed to increase, against all the laws of physics. It scared me. I was back in Inferno-land, climbing down into the quantum black hole Big Juju had used for artificial gravity . . .

Benito looked up at me curiously. "What did he say to you?"

I shook my head. We descended until all weight was centered at my navel. No quantum black hole crushed and swallowed me. I hadn't really expected one. I watched Benito work his way around until his feet pointed at me. I followed his example.

Now we climbed up. At one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

point I found breath to laugh at the picture we would have made: two men in nightshirts climbing at least half a mile of hairy leg. I half-expected to pass a dong the size of the Empire State Building, but there was nothing but hair.

The climb seemed endless, but it ended, not in ice but in an echoing grotto of rock. And the Devil's hooves still loomed over us, hooves big enough to stamp a city flat.

We rested flat on our backs on the rock. Presently I heard running water. I got up and found the stream and drank from it. The water was clear and sweet.

Benito was on his feet. "Onward!" he cried. He began to climb the sides of the grotto. The handholds were not difficult, and he moved like a spider monkey, or like a fat man who no longer weighs anything at all.

He looked down from the roof of the grotto. It didn't end; it dwindled into a funnel shape that narrowed and narrowed but never quite shut.

"A four thousand mile climb, if Dante was half right!" he bellowed cheerfully. "Are you coming?"

"I'm afraid not."

"What did you say?"

"No!"

I sighed in exasperation when I saw him climbing back down, but I'd half-expected it. He dropped the last few feet, and it did seem he fell like a settling balloon, too slowly. "What was it Lucifer said to you?"

"He asked me what I would say to God."

"Well?"

"I have to know something before I can speak to God at all."

Benito waited.

"I have to know the purpose of Hell."

"When you reach Him you can ask Him."

"You don't get it. Every torture in Hell was too much too late. Punishment? But it's infinite punishment for things that are *little* in comparison. Dracula caused a lot of people a lot of pain and death, but it *ended*. George only lied to people to make them buy things! And, and what about the fat lady in the Vestibule area?

"So what's the purpose? To teach us a lesson? But we're *dead*. Revenge, punishment? Completely out of proportion. Balance? Does the universe need as much pain in it as pleasure? I couldn't *take* Heaven if that was the case."

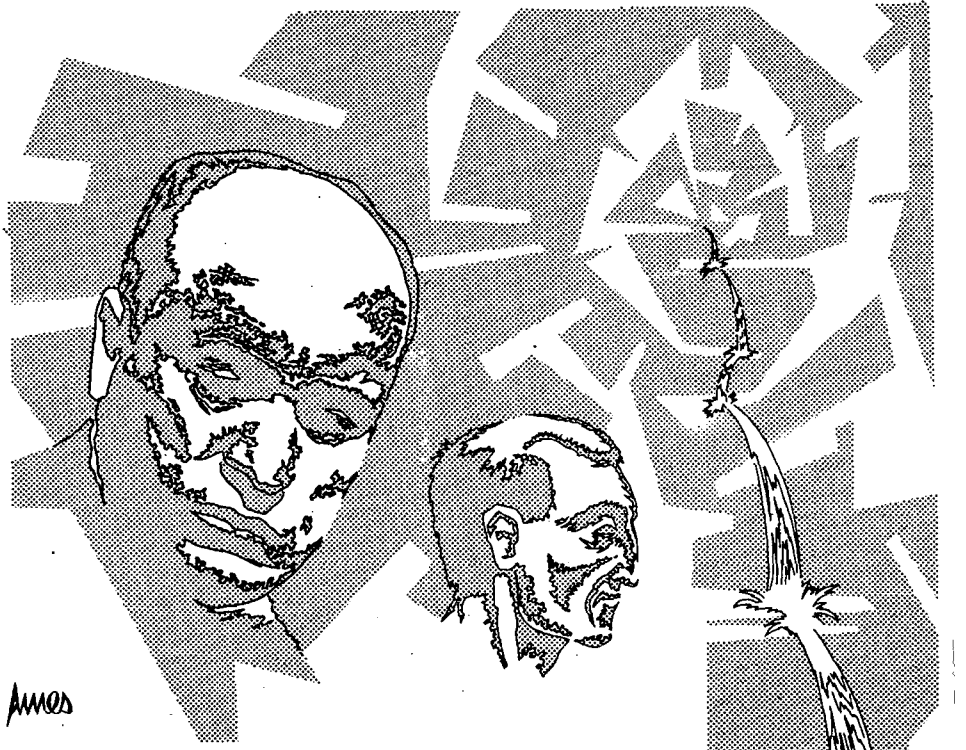
"There is a reason, and the reason is good. I *know*."

"Yeah? I don't. There's only one excuse for Hell, and I almost missed it in the ravings of a crazy psychiatrist. It has to be the final training ground. If nothing can get a soul into Heaven in its *life*, there's still Hell, God's last attempt to get his attention. Like a catatonic in a hot box, like me in that bottle, if Hell won't make a man yell for help, then it was still worth a try."

Benito was nodding. "You may be right. You may have found the purpose of Hell."

"Yeah. Yeah, but do you see what it means? It means that every soul in Hell has to be able to leave, once he's learned enough about himself. *Every* soul, even the trees in the Wood of the Suicides, even the poor devils in the boiling pitch and the sullen types anchored under the lake. Even the ones who think

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



they're satisfied, the ones in the First Circle. And I can't leave Hell until I'm sure they can do it."

Benito nodded. "We go back."

"No, no, you idiot!" I was furious. "How can I tell anyone *he* can leave unless I know *you* did? You're going up! And I'm going to watch you do it!"

"Carpenter, you must still learn humility."

"Granted. And you?"

"But they *need* me. They . . . ah. They have you."

"They have me."

He shook my hand. He began to climb.

★ ★ ★

I lay flat on the rock, not far from a rank-smelling wall of hair. There hadn't been many places to rest in Hell.

Benito had grown tiny when a pinpoint of light appeared beyond him. It brightened . . . and I knew that I was seeing the sun.

He'd made good progress before it dimmed and went out.

Much later, it appeared again. I found a speck next to it, that moved if I watched it long enough.

The light went out. When next it brightened there was a tiny mote in it, that moved. The light was dimming with sunset when the mote moved out of it and left it clear. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JERRY POURNELLE Ph. D.

A STEP FARTHER OUT

IN THE BEGINNING. . .

FIRST, LET ME ESTABLISH SOMETHING. When I go to Cal Tech I do *not* expect an experience out of H. P. Lovecraft. Horror may be interesting at the proper time and place, but it's not very pleasant as a total surprise.

It started peacefully enough. Dr. Robert Forward, the Hughes Research gravity expert you've heard of here and other places, called to ask if I would be interested in meeting Stephen Hawking. Since Hawking is considered by important physicists to possibly rank alongside Newton and Einstein, it took perhaps five milliseconds to think over the proposition. I didn't even need to look at my calendar; nothing I had planned could be that important.

A week later Larry Niven and I drove over to the California Institute of Technology. It was a bright spring afternoon. . . .

In order properly to tell this story I must now give some personal details about Professor Hawking. I've consulted his friends, who assure me that he doesn't mind.

Stephen Hawking is quite young, early thirties at the oldest. He is a resident theoretician at Cambridge University, and he yearly produces marvels in astronomical theory, particularly in the field of black-hole dynamics.

GALAXY readers will recall a previous column in which I described Hawking's fiery marriage of quantum mechanics to Einstein's classical relativity theories, to produce the startling prediction that black holes are unstable. (FUZZY BLACK HOLES HAVE NO HAIR, *GALAXY*, Jan. 1975) He is also responsible in large part for the so-called "laws of black-hole dynamics". An important man indeed.

Alas, Professor Hawking suffers from a nervous-system disorder which severely impairs his speech and confines him to a wheel chair.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those who attend his lectures are warned that they must listen closely; he can be understood, but only with difficulty and concentration. Of course, given the subject matter, this would be true if he spoke with the oratorical clarity of a William Jennings Bryan to such bards of the sciences as Larry and me; we were prepared to be doubly confused.

Cal Tech's architecture is a neat blend of Old California and modern LA; arched thick-walled Monterrey-style buildings with large shaded porches alternate with steel-and-glass towers and clean-lined functionalism. It sounds horrible, but the effect is actually quite pleasing. It's a nice place to be, especially if you're looking forward to hearing one of the truly great men of our time.

The lecture was in a small modern slant-floored room of the type sometimes called lecture theaters; the sort of classroom lecturers like. The tiered seats let everyone have a good view of the speaker and his materials, and give the speaker a good view of the audience.

It was only partly filled: graduate students, several undergraduates, a sprinkling of faculty, one or two of the top names in theoretical physics. It was a room of serious women and men, mostly younger than I, all expectantly quiet. At the bottom of the well, the focus of attention on the stage, was an incredibly thin, very young-appearing man seated in a high-backed motorized chair of Victorian design; the chair had no flavor of the hospital about it. He wore a light suit, dark shirt, and flowered tie, and he kept his hands folded carefully in his lap as he was introduced.

The chairman gave his credits and spoke wonderingly of how privileged we were to hear a man of this stature. No one disagreed. Not, of course, that anyone would have said anything no matter what he thought, but the total silence in the room was an obvious sign of unanimous assent.

Hawking began to speak. Everyone leaned slightly forward, straining to hear. Except for the heavily slurred voice there was absolutely no sound; you could quite literally hear a pen drop, for I dropped mine and it clattered loudly on the cement floor.

This is the scene, then: a lecture room partly filled with very bright people, a few extremely well known in theoretical physics, others students at one of the world's most prestigious institutions. They all strain to hear a wizened young man who makes awkward gestures and speaks with a thick slur that keeps his words just at the edge of intelligibility.

He grins like a thief. He's obviously not in pain and he doesn't feel sorry for himself. And he tells that room of bright, highly educated people that everything they thought they knew is nonsense. And he chuckles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He tells us that the pudding that ate Chicago may some day exist; that duplicates of each one of us may one day wander the universe; that *anything* can, and probably will, happen. He tells us that the universe isn't lawful, never will be lawful, never *can* be lawful; that we *cannot ever* know enough to predict the totality of events in this universe; that at best we study local phenomena that may be predictable for an unspecifiable time.

And he laughs.

He tells us that Cthulthu may exist after all.

As I said, it was an afternoon of Lovecraftian horror. Larry and I escaped with our sanity, after first, in the question period, making certain that Hawking really did say what we thought he'd said.

He had.

* * *

Stephen Hawking's lecture had originally been entitled "The Breakdown of Physics in the Region of Space-Time Singularities." The title was flashed on the screen; then another slide took its place, and Hawking chuckled. The new slide:

THE BREAKDOWN OF PHYSICISTS
IN THE REGION OF
SPACE-TIME SINGULARITIES

He began simply enough. The principle of equivalence, he said, is well established. This is the principle that states that *inertial* mass, that is, the resistance of objects to being moved by an outside force, is exactly equivalent to *gravitational* mass, that is, the gravitational force a given mass will exert: there is only one kind of mass.

This was Galileo's Principle, and the source of the famous if apocryphal story of his dropping a cannon-ball and a musket-ball from the Leaning Tower of Pisa and observing them striking the ground at the same time. Obviously if gravitational and inertial mass were different, heavy objects would *not* fall at the same speed as light ones.

So far so good. Next, gravity affects light. It can bend light rays, as predicted by Einstein and observed several times in solar eclipses.

Now in short order: the energy-momentum tensor of gravity is positive; gravity is universally attractive, not repellent. Therefore, enough mass will create a field from which no light can escape.

The Special Theory of Relativity says that nothing can travel faster than light.

And *therefore* sufficient mass must create a space-time singularity—a place which cannot be observed.

A singularity is therefore inevitable; that is, one must exist, provided only: (1) that Einstein's general relativity is correct; (2) gravity is truly attractive and never repellent) and (3), enough mass has ever been collected together.

And *therefore* at least one singu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

larity exists in our universe, since at the time of the Big Bang all the conditions certainly prevailed; and also, it's very likely that other singularities have been created by collapse of stars, since many stars have more than enough matter and don't have enough energy to throw that matter away as they die.

★ ★ ★

Okay so far? Nothing startling here. Bit dry, but all we've proved is that singularities must exist, and heck, nearly everyone accepts the idea now. They're hidden away inside black holes, of course, and observers are now very nearly certain that we can *observe* a black hole.

Well, not observe the hole itself; but Cygnus X-1, an x-ray emitting star in the constellation Cygnus, has an invisible companion and the pair of stars, the one we can see and the one we can't, together act very like what Cal Tech's Kip Thorne predicted such a pair would act like if one were a black hole.

So what else is new? We've proved black holes can exist, and lo, the observers think they've found one. What's scary about *that*?

Nothing, so far. Holes aren't scary unless you're about to fall into one. We even understand them. We know they "have no hair," that is, that they can be completely described given their mass, M; angular momentum, J; and electric charge, Q. Given these data we can describe their shape, and predict what effect they'll have on nearby objects, and play all kinds of fascinating scientific-theory games.

We can talk about black hole bombs, and toy with ideas on how to extract energy from them: take one rotating black hole, throw garbage into it, and you not only get rid of the garbage, but can get useful energy back out. There are speculations (not SF; just plain science) about extremely advanced civilizations using black holes for precisely that purpose.

There's just no end to the nice things you could do with black holes, and although not many years ago they were no more than toys for theoreticians to play mental games with, black holes have become household-word objects now.

Black holes don't make us nervous.

Ah, but inside each black hole there lurks a singularity. This is the little beastie that breaks down physics in the nearby regions. By definition they do things we can't predict. They behave in strange ways. Up close to them time reversals can happen. How, then, can we avoid this breakdown of our nice predictable universe?

Hawking discussed several theoretical alternatives, and dismissed each. A couple of the cases seemed to startle one of the big-name theoreticians listening to the lecture. When Hawking was finished, though, the singularities were back and inevitable. I won't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pretend to have understood all of this part of the lecture; and I wouldn't bore *GALAXY* readers with it if I had. If you appreciate that sort of thing you'll read Hawking's paper when it comes out.

For the rest of us I sum up by saying that he found no good alternatives; eliminating General Relativity doesn't eliminate the singularities, or else lands you in an even worse theoretical soup.

Therefore, let us look at General Relativity; but let us add quantum theory to it. Hawking recently published that work, and I described it here in January.

The important fact is that the quantum effects violate cosmic censorship. The Law of Cosmic Censorship, you may recall (December 1974 *GALAXY*) states that there shall be no naked singularities; every singularity shall be decently clothed with an event horizon that prevents us from ever being able to observe it directly, and thus prevents us from observing the region in which physics breaks down.

Thus we needn't fear the singularity. It can't affect our lives, because nothing it does can get out of that black hole "around" it.

But adding quantum effects to General Relativity repeals cosmic censorship. Black holes evaporate. Big ones slowly, small ones rapidly, all inevitably. And what of the singularity that MUST have been created by the Big Bang of creation?

Evaporation of black holes produces naked singularities. We may play about with the concept of quantizing relativity, and Hawking did; but the conclusion was inescapable. Again I don't pretend to have followed every step, nor did most of the rest of us in that room; but several did, and they weren't pleased.

Because now comes the punchline. The singularities emit matter and energy. And "they emit all possible configurations with equal probability. Perhaps this is why the early universe from the Big Bang singularity was in thermal equilibrium, and was very nearly homogeneous and isotropic; thermal equilibrium would represent the largest number of configurations."

But since that time the universe has changed, and we have stars and planets and nematodes and comets and great whales (for a little while longer) and people; but the singularity must still be around. It emits. And what comes out is completely random, absolutely uncorrelated. This fundamental breakdown in prediction—Hawking is saying not only that we can't predict *now*, but that in priciple we can *never* predict, no matter how much we know or how smart we get or how large a computer we build—is a "consequence of the fact that General Relativity allows fundamental changes in the topology of space-time; that is, allows holes.

"Matter and information can fall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into these holes—or can come out. And what comes out is completely random and uncorrelated."

The hole can emit anything. Anything at all.

"No," I thought. I looked to Niven. "No," he was thinking. Surely we misunderstood.

And the thin chap grinned ever more broadly. "Of course we might have to wait quite a while for it to emit one of the people here this afternoon, or myself, but eventually it must—"

Hawking chuckled and waited expectantly, and after a long and very silent pause first one, then another joined him in laughter; but it had a rather hollow sound, or so I thought. Larry agreed when we could talk about it later.

So far as we can tell, we've just heard one of the top people in theoretical physics tell us that we don't know anything and can't know anything; that causality is a local phenomenon of purely temporary nature; that time travel is possible; that Cthulthu might emerge from a singularity, and indeed is as probable as, say, H. P. Lovecraft.

Hawking concluded by reminding us that Albert Einstein once said "God does not play dice with the universe."

"On the contrary," Hawking said, "it appears that not only does God play dice, but also that he sometimes throws the dice where they cannot be seen!"

* * *

Lovecraftian horror indeed. Our rational universe is crumbling. Western civilization assumes reason; that *some things are impossible, that's all,* and we can know that; that werewolves don't exist, and there never was, never could be, a god Poseidon, or an Oracle that spoke truly; that the universe is at least in principle discoverable by human reason, is *knowable.*

That, says one of the men we believe best understands this universe, is not true. It's not very probable that Cthulthu will emerge from the primieval singularity created in the Big Bang, or that Poseidon will suddenly appear on Mount Olympus, but neither is *impossible*; and for that matter, this world we think we understand, which seems to obey rational laws we can discover, isn't very probable either—isn't, in fact, in the long run, any more probable than a world that includes Cthulthu, or the pudding that ate Chicago.

* * *

Well, of course I don't believe that; not in the sense that I'm going to alter my life to conform to a lawless and unpredictable universe. But I am now reduced to an act of faith: an irrational belief that the world and universe are, must be, lawful, and rational.

This is not "faith in science" or believing in science; not any more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It never was, actually; but Hawking has laid bare the hidden flaw. So long as science itself concluded that the universe was lawful, few of us were tempted to ask *why* this should be so, or to realize that this is the one question science can never answer.

Now, though, science itself says the universe is not lawful. If you want a lawful universe, you've got to take a leap of faith; you've got to hold fast to an irrational belief. While you're doing that, why not also believe there's a higher purpose to it all?

Is it harder to believe the universe is lawful and purposeful than to believe it is lawful but without purpose?

* * *

In the Beginning, the Big Bang emitted Chaos; and the Chaos was without form, and void, for it was homogeneous and isotropic. And the Singularity moved upon the face of the Chaos and emitted light; and the Universe was no longer homogeneous, for the light was divided from the darkness.

And there came forth firmaments and dry land and seas and stars and moons; and the worlds brought forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit trees yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself.

It is quite literally true that if you can believe that, you can believe anything; more, you *must* believe anything. To exclude anything you must make an act of faith.

* * *

As we drove away from Pasadena, Larry remarked that if we ever had proximity to a singularity, he could well imagine people praying to it. After all, their prayers probably wouldn't influence what came out of it—but they might, and certainly nothing else would. I even had an idea for a filippant story to be entitled "The Oracle."

I don't think I'll write that story.

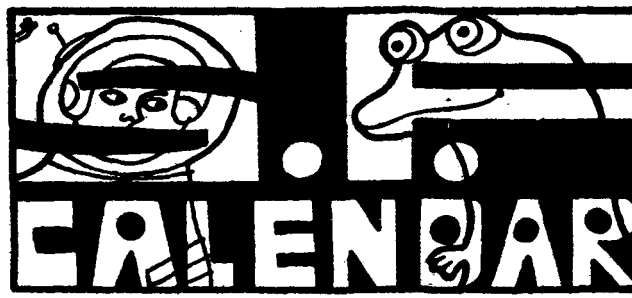
If this new work of Hawking's holds up—and if we've correctly interpreted what we heard—there are going to be some changes in the fundamentals of Western Civilization.

Will philosophy once again become the "Queen of Sciences?" I don't know; I suspect, though, that what we heard during our Lovecraftian afternoon will have a long reach. We either need some fundamental new breakthroughs in theoretical physics—and I've heard no hint of what they may be—or we'll have to start thinking about faith again.

Meanwhile, for next month Larry Niven and I have collaborated to give you the "lost preface" to THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE, and a double-length article on how we created the cultures and science in MOTE—a universe which *is* lawful.

We've beem promised a spectacular cover and illustrations, too. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



SEPT. 26–28. PghLANGE, Holiday Inn, Monroeville, PA. GoH: L. Sprague de Camp. Membership: $4 in advance, $5 at the door. For info: Frank Richards, 2121 Murray Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA., 15217.

OCT. 24–26. MILEHICON VII, Sheraton Airport Inn, Denver, Colorado. GoH: Joanna Russ. Fan GoH: Bob Vardeman. Registration: $3 in advance, $5 at the door. For info: Ted Peak, 1556 Detroit, Denner, Colorado, 80206.

OCT. 31-Nov 2. 1st World Fantasy Convention, Holiday Inn, Providence, R.I. GoH: Robert Bloch. Toastmaster: Gahan Wilson. Membership: $12.50. Banquet (add'l): $7.50. For info: 1st World Fantasy Convention, P.O. Box 135, Middle Village Sta., Middle Village, L.I., N.Y. 11379

NOV. 7–10. TusCon III, Tucson Inn, Tucson, Arizona. GoH: Gordon Eklund. Registration: $4 until November 1st; $5 thereafter. VIP memberships: $10. For info: TusCon III, P.O. Box 49196, Tuscon, Arizona, 85719.

NOV. 22–23. MEXICON I, Guadalajara, Mexico. GoH: Mack Reynolds. Membership: $5 attending, $3 supporting. Make checks payable to Elliot Weinstein. For info: Elliot Weinstein, APDO 6-869, Guadalajara 6, Jalisco, Mexico.

JAN 2–4, 1976. CHATTANOOGA SF CON 76, Sheraton Chattanooga South, Chattanooga, TN. GoH: Cliff Amos; Mc: Meade Frierson III. Keith Laumer and others, attending. Registration: $5; Banquet: $6.50. For info: Irvin Koch, c/o 835 Chatt Bk Bg, Chattanooga, TN.

FEB. 13–15. BOSKONE 13, Boston, Mass. GoH: Poul Anderson. For info: NESFA, Box G, MIT Station, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

APRIL 16–19. MANCON 5, Owens Park, Manchester, England. 27th British SF con. GoH: Robert Silverberg. Fan GoH: Peter Roberts. Membership: $5 attending until Sept. 1st, $6 thereafter; $2 supporting. For infor: Brian Robinson, 9 Linwood Grove, Longsight, Manchester, UK., or Bill Burns, 48 Lou Avenue, Kings Park, N.Y. 11754.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HELL BENT 4

Stephen Robinette

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fighting Spacethings had been a relatively simple task—dealing with Mission Control was another matter entirely!

"HELLO, MISSION CONTROL, can you read me? Over. . . ."

Static snapped, crackled, popped in response.

". . . This is Helbent Four, Mission Control. Come in. . . ."

Helbent listened, then shut down the communications channel. Why listen to dead air? Why watch static? Life was touch enough without being ignored, snubbed, shown complete and utter indifference. Gone three hundred years just to be snubbed and ignored. He opened the communications channel briefly, boosting the gain to a shout.

"Who needs it, creeps? Life's too short!"

What now? Orbit Earth and wait? Helbent searched his memory banks, checking, rechecking. He was programmed for every contingency but one, coming home. He had known exactly where to meet the Spacethings, exactly what to do when he got there. He had met them and done it, goal attained, purpose accomplished. Afterward, discovering himself the lone survivor, he had searched his memory banks for a new plan, a new purpose. None appeared.

True, his designers had estimated a ten to one overkill on both sides.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

True, the estimates proved correct—at least as far as the Spacethings were concerned. True, they had been 99.999998 percent accurate in estimating Earth losses, but—*damn* them—they could at least have programmed for the vague possibility of a Destroyer surviving. Probabilities and predictions were fine in their place—before the fact—but after the fact, the .000002 percent probability of his survival became a hundred-percent certainty.

Helbent took up a parking orbit and circled Earth, thinking. Purposeless—actually, left only with his original purpose—he felt useless. No more Spacethings, no more purpose. He almost regretted having destroyed them. On the 150 year trip out, his purpose—save mankind and destroy Spacethings—never flagged. Only with success did he feel loss.

He remembered approaching the Spacething armada, flanked by his comrades for a million kilometers on each side. He remembered the look of the Spacething craft, initially a single unit a half million kilometers long, breaking up into sections and dispersing in front of him at close range. He remembered the momentary hesitation before the battle, each side waiting for the other's opening blast. Helbent himself had decided the day. He knew his goal.

He had his purpose. He had come to fight. He would fight. He sighted on the nearest Spacething and fired.

After the battle—elapsed time 2.478 nanoseconds—the anticlimax set in. Helbent, alone in space, wondered what to do. The Spacethings were gone. His comrades of the long journey out were gone. Only one thing remained—Earth, mankind, his place of creation. He started back.

* * *

Helbent opened all communication channels.

"And what do I get when I get there? Not even a how do you do!"

"Hello?"

Startled, Helbent snapped off the transmitter. Had he actually heard it? A word, a voice, a human being? Cautiously, suspiciously, he went on the air.

"Who is this?"

"Who is *this*?"

"You first. This could be a Spacething trap."

"Pardon me?"

"You heard me. Who are you?"

"This is Houston Mission Control—I mean, it would be Mission Control if we had a mission to control. Actually, it's just me. I saw your blip. It's not supposed to be there."

"That just shows how much you guys know, doesn't it?"

"You speak English very well for a—"

"For a what?"

"Alien."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Alien," scoffed Helbent. "You people wouldn't know an alien if one blasted you. What did you expect, Armenian? I was programmed by the NASA contingent. They speak English, I speak English. Never did get along with those Rusky-speaking ships. Always sounded like backwards English to me. Had to talk to them in binary. Damned impersonal. Now tell me what you want me to do, Mission Control. I'm back."

"Do?"

" 'Do?' " mimicked Helbent, repeating the man's own voice with precision, then dropping into his own—or, more accurately, that of his programmer, a surly man with whom Helbent never got along. "You sound like you've never heard the word before."

"I have, I mean, I haven't, at least not from anything in space."

Helbent's temper flared. "You call me a Spacething again, buster, and I'll *blast* you. I'll home in on that static-ridden carrier of yours with a . . . a . . . " Helbent thought, visualizing the largest weapon in his largely depleted arsenal. " . . . neutrino bomb." He had none aboard.

Dead air, snap, crackle, pop.

Gutless, concluded Helbent. Typical, gutless human behavior. One mention of a neutrino bomb and they head for the woods. He had always suspected humans were cowards. Why else send a robot to do a man's job?

Helbent repositioned himself in synchronous orbit over Houston.

"You down there, creep, speak up. No bombs, I guarantee."

The ground carrier flicked on and off briefly, long enough to blurt out its message. "What do you want?"

"I told you what I want. I want to know what I'm supposed to *do*. I am thy servant, remember?"

A quick on-off flick of the carrier. "No."

"Listen, you chicken-headed stooge, will you quit snapping that damn transmitter in my ear and *talk* to me. And send up some visuals while you're at it. I like to see who I'm talking to."

"Visuals?"

"Little pictures, you know, television, that sort of thing."

"There's no equipment for sending visuals, as you call them."

"I know damn well there's equipment for sending visuals. Why would I have equipment for receiving visuals if you didn't have equipment for sending them? Riddle me that, wise guy. Now, get off the stick and turn on the little pictures."

"Who are you, anyway?"

Momentarily, Helbent wished he still had at least one neutrino bomb on board. "I am going to say it once. I am going to say it clearly. You will listen with both ears and pay attention with your mind, if you have one. Got that?"

"Yes."

"Good. I am Helbent Four. I am

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reporting back to you clowns because I can't think of anything better to do with my time. If I *could* think of something better to do with my time, you may be ninty-nine point nine, nine, nine, nine, eight percent certain I would do it. Mission accomplished. Got that? No more Spacethings. All gone. Boom. Got that? The next move—since I find trying to carry on an intelligent conversation with the subcretinous beings I now find inhabiting this planet totally frustrating and wish to restrain myself from doing something I may later regret—is up to you. I will keep a listening channel open on this frequency, a somewhat *low* frequency, I might add. If you have anything sensible to say, contact me. Got that?"

A pause ensued. Houston's carrier remained on the air. Finally, the man spoke. "What's a Spacething?"

Helbent, infuriated, remembering the battle and his lost comrades, remained silent as long as he could, stifling his anger. When stifling proved worse than venting, he cranked up the gain to maximum and spoke.

"THAT," he began, mollified only by the thought that in three hundred years man's essential trait—ingratitude—had persisted, simultaneously recognizing that organically based consciousness was subject to emotional caprice—unlike machines—and had to be allowed for, taking these things into consideration and discarding each as unpersuasive, he concluded, *"IS AN INSULT!"*

"Sorry," piped Mission Control.

* * *

Helbent waited, hoping the man would have enough sense to find someone who knew what he was doing. He ran the odds on finding such a person through the computer.

Insufficient data.

"What do you mean, insufficient data, you dumb beast? Why don't you use a little imagination?"

Insufficient data.

Helbent harumpfed, recognizing the harumpf as his way of letting off steam. He had known the computer for three hundred years. It had never, to his knowledge, shown the slightest inclination toward imagination. It was and remained a dumb beast, a fellow machine, true, a brother under the skin, true, but dumb, its stupidity matched only by that of their mutual human designers who thought an analytical function detached from the conscious function would give the ship more flexibility, allowing uninhibited imagination to continue without analytic censure—usually in the form of statistical probabilities—from the logic circuits. Only in combat did they function as one, allowing split nanosecond decisions.

Helbent realized the irrationality of expecting the computer to suddenly come up with an imagination. Its type of cold and logical critic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seldom had imagination. Helbent apologized. "Sorry."

Insufficient data.

"If you could bark or something, you'd be a better companion."

Helbent waited, one, two, three hours. Early evening approached and descended upon Houston. He decided to listen to the news. Three hundred years was a long time without news. He scanned the 50,000 megahertz band, looking for a news broadcast. More dead air. He searched higher, then switched to lasercom. Nothing. He remembered Houston's low frequency and searched the low end of the spectrum, encountering commercial television broadcasts flanking one hundred megahertz. He adjusted the five thousand line scan of his own visuals to the five hundred-odd lines of the commercial transmissions, commenting, "That's a giant step backwards if I ever saw one."

Flickering, someone named Walter read the news.

" . . . and further, NASA reports the aliens, which call themselves Spacethings, have taken up a synchronous orbit over Houston. . . . ."

Spacethings? Over Houston? Quickly, Helbent did a spherical scan to a distance of a quarter of a million kilometers. No sign of any Spacethings. Still, it was good to know they were in the area.

" . . . Again, NASA cautions against panic. The recently dismantled Space Operations Headquarters at Houston is being mantled—I mean, manned. Kennedy Space Center is readying a bird at this moment." Walter, the news reader, turned to a man next to him at the desk. The camera pulled back to include both men. "Wally, while we're waiting for any late developments, perhaps you can tell us the difference between the Saturn Five being readied at this moment and those used in the Apollo missions."

"Certainly, Walter."

" 'Certainly, Walter,' " mimicked Helbent, wondering what a Saturn Five was. He had a lot of catching up to do on technical material.

"Hold it a second, Wally," said Walter, breaking in. "Let me break in with a few more details about Brad Wilkes' background. For those of you who joined us late, Brad Wilkes is the man who first contacted the alien craft."

"Thanks, Walter," said Helbent, who had joined them late.

"He is not by a long shot an ordinary janitor. B.A., Cal. Tech., M.A., Ph.D., M.I.T. in systems engineering. Before Congress killed the space program entirely—and I'm sure there will be repercussions about that at the next election, Wally."

"I'm sure there will be, too, Walter."

"Before that, Dr. Wilkes was Mission Control supervisor at Houston."

"That explains his knowledge of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the equipment, doesn't it, Walter."

"It certainly does, Wally. It says here—and this is a poignant note—that Dr. Wilkes would test the equipment daily, more to evoke memories than anything else. It was during one of these nostalgic systems checks that Dr. Wilkes discovered the alien blip and conversed with it. He claims it learned perfect English almost instantaneously. Do you have any comment on that, Wally?"

"I wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole, Walter."

"While we're waiting, Eric *(transmission garbled)* has a few thoughts on the subject. Here's his analysis. Eric?"

The picture changed to a closeup of a distinguished looking man already talking into the camera. Helbent was struck immediately by the intelligence in the man's face.

"Today, mankind encountered an alien race, an alien creature . . . "

A spacething? Helbent wondered.

" . . . an intelligence so powerful it learned human speech —idiomatically—during its first conversation. . . ."

Helbent, metaphorically, shivered. He had never encountered an alien intelligence *that* powerful. Spacethings, according to the brief observation he had of them, could barely talk. Even after the warpstorm, disorienting him for several years, when he contacted the creatures on Wolff 25c, they had proved close to morons. He hoped the powerful alien intelligence would keep its distance.

" . . . For years," continued the distinguished Eric, "Sci-Fi has given us bug-eyed monsters and winged phantasmagorias. . . ."

Helbent searched his memory banks, looking for the meaning of phantasmagoria.

". . . For years, we laughed in Sci-Fi's face. Today, we are not laughing. Today, we seek as it sought—alone, neglected those many years. We seek understanding, knowledge, brotherhood across the stars and a Saturn Five capable of delivering multi-warhead nuclear weapons in space. Back to you, Walter."

To Helbent, the man made sense. Helbent, for one, would never laugh in the face of a winged phantasmagoria.

The low frequency communication channel from Houston came alive. Helbent shut off the commercial channel—Walter, Wally and Eric.

"Hello, creature. This is Houston."

"And about *time*, too."

"Don't get angry."

"Who's angry?"

"You sounded, well, petulant."

Helbent searched his memory banks for the meaning of the word—petulant, p-e-t-u-l—found it and answered. "Who's petulant?"

"We mean you no ill will."

"Thank NASA for small favors."

"But we must clear up some dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crepancies in our earlier conversation. You can understand the need for that."

"On *your* side, sure."

"May we ask some questions?"

Irritated, Helbent allowed as to how they could ask some questions. During construction and initial testing, neither Helbent nor any ship of the armada had been asked its permission to do anything. He had been told to do things. He had learned, early, that human beings gave orders, machines took them, human beings gave direction and purpose, robotships followed directions and fulfilled purposes. Having his permission asked wrankled. He wanted orders. He wanted to know what to *do*. Still, the request, coming from a human being, amounted to an indirect sort of order. When the man failed to ask his question immediately, Helbent said, "Fire away."

"THEY'RE FIRING!" shreaked Houston, abruptly leaving the air.

"Who?" inquired Helbent. Too late. The carrier had vanished. "Hey, Houston. Who?"

Helbent scanned in a half million kilometer sphere. Nothing. No Spacethings, no Phantasmagorias, at least not firing. Only Earth was fir—Earth?

Something, evidently someone's idea of a rocket, lumbered up from Earth. Helbent watched, fascinated. The thing looked like some kind of antique. Suddenly, Helbent realized its true purpose—a salute. Someone dragged the antique from the Smithsonian and launched it, a tribute to his valor. Everything else had been arranged to hoodwink him and let this moment of tribute shine alone like a single rose in the hand of a beautiful woman.

Helbent felt pride, not only at resurrecting the rose simile from some novel in his memory banks, but at this tribute—so singular, so appropriate, so moving. He opened all communication channels to acknowledge the tribute.

"Thank you, America. Thank you, Earth. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking . . ." Helbent noticed the antique make a midcourse burn. ". . . I would nevertheless like to say a few words—but only a few—concerning the depths of emotion I feel at this tribute. After returning from the depths of space, I am deeply moved by the deep sentiment I detect behind this romantic and deeply felt—" Helbent detected something else, the computer's insistent mutter, interrupting his speech. "What *is* it, damn it? I'm speaking to the world, immortal words, and you keep butting in. *What*, for the love of NASA, is it?"

Impact, twenty-one point two, nine, five seconds.

"Pardon me?"

Impact, nineteen point oh, oh, one seconds.

Though Helbent hated to destroy such a classic of human ingenuity, the thing seemed to be off course.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even if it carried only low-grade nuclear weapons, it could still cause damage, a dent or a crease. Momentarily, he merged sensibilities with the computer. Reluctantly, he sent out a molecular shock wave and watched the missile collapse, then explode.

Helbent separated himself from the computer and returned to his speech. "As I was saying, ladies and gentlemen, deeply moved as I am by this—"

Impact, six point three-one . . .

"Impact! What the hell are you jabbering about? I just destroyed the poor thing."

. . . seven seconds, concluded the implacable computer.

Helbent searched space. Another antique—Russian by the markings (He recognized the CCCP his late comrades had carried)—lifted toward him. The sight of it moved him more than ever. The Ruskies saluting a machine created, developed and built in America (except for a few Japanese electronic components here and there)—Ahh, *that* was tribute.

But, unfortunately, the Ruskie bird too had veered. Evidently, the Russian museum piece was as unreliable as the American. Helbent merged with the computer, pulsed a photon beam at the Russian vehicle and mentally saluted its quick demise. He disengaged himself from the computer.

The Houston ground channel opened. Helbent was about to thank them for their deeply felt tribute and apologize for having to destroy such venerable craft, when a voice interrupted, less hesitant, more authoritative, though spouting the same nonsensical questions as the previous timid voice.

"Who are you?"

Helbent, in his equivalent to a position of braced attention, responded to the tone of authority in the voice, ignoring the question's basic inanity. *"SIR!* Helbent Four of NASA Contingent, Earth Armada, reporting back, *SIR!"*

"Pardon me?"

Helbent unbraced. Wrong again. Another moron. Helbent prepared to switch off the channel and continue his speech to the world.

The voice interrupted. "You said *Earth* Armada."

"I did indeed."

"And NASA."

"National Aeronautics and—"

"I know what it means. We are trying to ascertain—and it is of primary importance that we do ascertain—whether you are friendly."

"I'm trying to 'ascertain' the same thing."

"Good, then we have a common interest."

"I doubt it."

"May I ask you a few questions, Helbent Four—May I call you that?"

"Helbent's fine."

"Where do you come from, Helbent?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Earth."

A pause ensued. "When?"

"Three hundred years ago."

"Sixteen hundred years ago."

"Sixteen eighty?"

"There abouts."

"From what country?"

Patience thinning, Helbent controlled himself, suspecting the interrogation could be some form of subtle system's check. "The U.S. of A. That stands for—"

The man interrupted with a patronizing, paternal tone. "In sixteen eighty, there was no United States, Helbent."

Helbent's patience expired. "Now, *listen*, Houston, I know you engineering types are weak on history, but *I* am not. I have my memory banks—along with Gerber's *Decline and Fall of the Carthagenian Empire*—Henry Iron Commanger's *Complete History of the United States*. Volume one deals with the Founding Fathers, Washington, Jefferson and our first President, Schwartz, recounting their heroic labors in fifteen twenty-one—*fifteen twenty-one*, Houston. You do know the names of the Founding Fathers, don't you?"

"Schwartz doesn't ring a bell."

"It *should*, the Harry S. Therman of his day, one of the truly great figures in human history. I shall read, for your edification and education, from Professor Commanger's history. It will, I am sure, make more sense than what you've been blathering." Helbent began reading volume one to Houston.

Houston tried to interrupt.

"What is it *now*, Houston?"

"I think we're having difficulty communicating."

Mentally, Helbent checked all his equipment. Everything seemed intact. "It's all on your end, Houston. Systems check shows no malfunction."

"That isn't what I meant. You say you come from Earth."

"I *do* come from Earth."

"You say you come from the United States."

"A gen-u-wine native son."

"Then you're human."

"Of *course* I'm not human. If I were human, I would have been back here with the rest of you lily-livered ingrates instead of a hundred and twenty light years out in space almost getting my ascent engine shot off. Now, I'm getting extremely tired of answering these inane questions. Can we move on to something else? Something sensible?"

"Like what?"

"Like what you want me to *do*."

"Hold on, Helbent."

Hold on. Hold on. Get to the crux of the matter and Houston says hold on. He was beginning to think the First Folio edition of Darwin's *Origin of the Genus* was wrong. What goes up must come down. In three hundred years, humanity—at least that part of it represented by Houston—had evidently begun the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

long descent back to primordial slime.

* * *

Helbent switched on the commercial frequency to kill time. Walter and Wally were still talking. Eric, whom Helbent wished would take over Houston ground-control, was unavailable.

"Walter."

"Yes, Wally."

"With this new data—both the Soviet and American vehicles utterly destroyed and Houston saying the thing claims Earth—"

"Claims to be from Earth, Wally. They aren't exactly the same thing."

"Still, Walter, it's a distinction without a difference. If the thing *thinks* it belongs here, for whatever reason, if our ICBM's are to it as wanton flys to boys—"

"I think the phrase is 'flys to wanton boys,' Wally. Maybe Eric would know." Walter pressed an earphone further into his ear. "Eric?"

"I'm here, Walter. The phrase is from . . . "

Wally, anxious, reached over and grabbed Walter's lapels, shaking the older man.

"Listen to me, Walter. This is important."

" . . . Shakespeare," concluded Eric.

"I'm listening, Wally."

"Maybe, Walter, if they can do all that, maybe we should give up."

Walter looked stunned. "Give up?"

"It swatted aside our boys like wanton *flys*, Walter!" Wally shook Walter. "Like wanton *flys!*"

"You're getting hysterical, Wally. Where's that famous astronaut's calm?"

Wally released Walter, dropping his head to the table and supporting it with his forearm, sobbing audibly. "*Gone! Gone! Every*thing's *gone!*"

Walter looked at the camera. "Let's see what Eric (*Transmission garbled*) has to say about that. Eric?"

At last, thought Helbent, sense.

The distinguished man came on the screen. "Wally, I'm going to have to disagree with your analysis. The thing fired only in self-defence. True, it destroyed our best defenses. True, that demonstrates a technical capability far superior to our own. True, NASA reports the thing has a surly attitude. But, it continues to talk. It seems open to reasoned debate. My decision would be to continue that debate, to learn from a superior culture. Properly handled, mankind might well make a quantum leap into the future. Back to you, Walter."

Helbent switched off to think. Somewhere in Eric's commentary, Helbent had picked up a thought. He wanted to ponder it. "Computer, what is the probability that Walter and Wally—and especially Eric—were referring, not to Space-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

things or winged Phantasmagoria, but me?"

Ninty-nine point nine eight percent.

"That high?"

Affirmative.

"That's the first time I've ever heard you be that positive about anything."

The computer remained silent, responsive only to questions or orders.

"What's the probability this civilization has been degenerating for three hundred years?"

Insufficient data—unempirical estimate below point oh-oh-oh-one percent.

Abruptly, an idea—intuitive, unanalyzed, yet convincing—forced its way into Helbent's musing, exactly the kind of idea his designers had hoped to stimulate by separating the squelching and critical faculty of the computer from Helbent's sterling creative imagination. What if—"Computer, what is the probability of finding a second planet in our Galaxy—no, strike that. In our *uni*verse—I might as well think big—a second planet with the same biological evolution as Earth's, the same socio-cultural-linguistic evolution, the same geophysical characteristics, *but*—this is important computer, so pay attention—an evolution on all levels three hundred years behind Earth prime, a dwarfed, stunted, pigmy Earth, historio-culturally speaking?"

The computer responded immediately, plopping out a decimal point followed by a string of zeros so long Helbent lost count. The sequence terminated with a "one to the minus", another enormous figure.

"That small, huh?"

Affirmative.

Helbent pondered. It made less sense than Wally and Walter. Either two Earths existed—accounting for the primitive state of present human technology, the jumbled and inaccurate version of their history, as well as the biological dysfunction he suspected in their brains—or—or what?

"I need *data*, dammit, *raw* data."

He tried to reach the Library of Congress on the standard frequency. No response. He relocated over Washington and switched to high power optical observation, penetrating the cloud layer, searching out the Library of Congress, peering in through a dirty window.

"Books?"

Helbent shuddered. With an information retrieval system that clumsy, he would need the next three hundred years to find even basic facts. Imagination sapped, he abandoned the task. He sat in space, mind ruminating. When all else failed—when even imagination failed—he still had one alternative; brute logic.

"Computer, read out every possibility capable of explaining our current situation. Give me the probability of each."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The computer hesitated. In three hundred years, Helbent had never known the computer to hesitate. Malfunction?

"Systems check."

All systems go.

"Then why the *hell* are you sitting around here on your flip-flops? Flip or flop, but get on the stick. This is an order, computer. Prepare to read out! Reeeeead *OUT!*"

The computer read out, a momentous rush of probabilities and possibilities, an inundation, a deluge. Data of incredible complexity blew through Helbent's mind like a hurricane, bending biosynthetic synapses like palm trees.

Slowly, Helbent adjusted. He began looking for only high probability explanations. One rushed past. He snatched it from the torrent. He waited, enduring the storm, for another.

None appeared.

Abruptly, the data storm abated and died.

"That's it?"

Readout complete.

Helbent stared at the sole, high probability explanation in disbelief. So simple! So obvious! Had he been capable of wearing a cap, snatching it from his head, flinging it to the ground and stomping on it, he would have done so. "That *damn* warpstorm! If they told me *once*, they must have told me a *million* times to watch out for those damn things."

He degenerated into several nanoseconds of cursing, some of it expressable only in binary.

"All right, so a warpstorm disoriented me near Wolff 25c. So the only high probability explanation suggests I slipped through the gap left when the warpstorm excised a black hole, squeezing me out of one universe and into another. So I arrived back at this technologically—probably intellectually—retarded Earth. So what?"

Helbent pondered.

Houston broke in. "Mr. Helbent, this is Houston. What is your purpose here, your mission?"

Helbent, now fully aware of mankind's abysmal ignorance, answered flatly, cooperatively. "Save humanity."

"From what?"

Though tempted to say itself, he answered, "Spacethings, but since they have been destroyed—" Helbent broke off in mid-sentence, an idea forming in his mind. In his own universe, the Spacethings had been destroyed. As the sole veteran of the battle, he could testify to it.

But here, in this universe—

He looked in the direction of Sagittarius. Indeed, the binary home of the Spacethings existed in this universe, a faint speck with a white dwarf companion. If, as he now believed, he had arrived at a different Earth in a different universe—a universe centuries out of joint with his own, an intellectually retrograde universe—confrontation with *this*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

universe's Spacethings lay in the future.

"Mr. Helbent?"

"What?" snapped Helbent, irritated at the interruption to his ponderings.

"What's a Spacething?"

Hypothesis confirmed. Helbent made up his mind. He felt a surge of new energy. No longer a pointless creation, he felt his sense of direction and purpose return. He looked toward Sagittarius and experienced something like love. Out there, beyond the reach of Houston's paltry imagination, stood an entire universe, vast and beautiful, full of Spacethings waiting to be killed.

He turned his attention to Houston. No time to lose. Three hundred years, he had read somewhere, constituted only a blink of the cosmic eye. Spacethings would be there before anyone knew it. "Listen, Houston, do you people have some kind of ground recording system? Wire recorders? Record players? Little men with clay tablets?"

"Yes."

"O.K. Get your styli going on the tablets. I'm going to tell you about Spacethings."

Helbent told them, in gruesome detail, tales of demands and appeasements, battles and conquests—finally, the awesome 2.478 nanosecond clash of empires. Anticlimactically, he added a short account of the long journey home, the warpstorm, his arrival.

When he finished, his emotions strained to the limit by the experiences he had forced himself to relive, Houston failed to respond.

"Houston?"

"Wait five, Helbent. We're thinking."

"*Thinking! Thinking!* Isn't the picture clear enough? Do I have to spell it out for you? *You, mankind, Earth*—all are in mortal *danger*. You must, immediately, divert every resource into combating this imminent and immanent menace. Do you understand that?"

Houston took the entire five minutes. "We have reached our decision."

"Thank NASA."

"We intend to fight."

Helbent heaved a sigh of relief.

"Though initially we wished to pursue the path of reason, our President—consulting directly with world leaders and advised by the world's most distinguished scientists—has decided to resist."

Helbent beamed with pride and satisfaction.

"Frankly, your tale of interstellar empires and conquests, warpstorms and final battles—interesting and ingenious a fabrication as it is—"

"Fabrication!"

"—won't hold water."

"Won't hold—Now, wait just a minute, Houston—"

"*You* wait just a minute. Our top scientists assure us such a transfer between universes, even assuming other universes exist—cannot occur.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Your story is a charade, a ruse, a trick to gain our confidence before you—"

"A *charade!* A *ruse!*"

"You have five minutes to break orbit and clear out of our solar system. If you refuse, those two missiles—missiles, I might add, that our experts tell us you were lucky enough to destroy only because they came at you one at a time—will prove only a sample of our fateful lighting, our swift sword. Anything and everything capable of doing damage—from multi-warhead nuclear weapons to .22 bullets—will be used. We will fight you on the beaches, in the field and in the town. We will fight you in the cities, if we have to, underground.

Helbent, who had never cared much for verse, tried to interrupt.

Houston continued. "The men of Earth—of mine own land—will fight you o'er the planet, for every grain of sand."

"That won't be necessary, Houston."

"You have," delclared Houston, "five minutes."

Houston's carrier left the air.

* * *

Helbent spent the five minutes thinking, mulling over possibilities and probabilities. He considered breaking orbit and following orders. The orders, after all, had come from human beings. Still, though he admired the fighting spirit behind the orders, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt the folly of carrying them out. If he broke orbit, he would abandon mankind, at least this mankind in this universe. They would be left to molder in their retarded culture until this universe's Spacethings came to crush them under an iron tentacle.

At the end of five minutes, what looked to Helbent like a miniature armada lifted off from Earth, missiles firing from silos across the United States, submarines across the seas and gantries across the Soviet Union. Gradually, they approached, converging on him. Helbent turned the job of tracking and destroying the creeping missiles over to the computer, leaving his own mind free to think.

He took the problem step by step, logically. These creatures—the idea of their profaning the name of human annoyed him—seemed bound and determined to repel him. That they had no means to do so, that their technological arsenal had taken only one short step beyond the sharp stick, that their capacity to go further might be doubted by any reasonable mind, never occured to them. (Missiles and warheads exploded harmlessly around him.)

Still, he found himself unable to break orbit and abandon the fools to their folly. Besides, the more he thought about it (a fifty kiloton warhead detonated nearby, jostling the ship but otherwise leaving it undamaged), the more he realized that breaking orbit would be to simul-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taneously break his prime directive.

A plan, he needed one. He had to convince them of the danger ahead. He had to convince them to act immediately, to prepare, technologically and psychologically, for the inevitable Spacething invasion. Something Eric had said came back to him: " . . . Properly handled, mankind might well make a quantum leap into the future."

It made sense, the only sense Helbent had heard recently. Yet the sense it made chilled him. It went against everything ingrained in his memory banks, against every directive but the prime directive. To accomplish it, he would have to do things unheard of, undreamt of, unplanned for by his designers. He would have to reverse every fiber of his soldier's psychology, give up the keystone of his pride, the core of his identity—he would have to return to Earth not victor but vanquished.

Still, quantum leaps were quantum leaps.

Helbent picked his target and fed in the coordinants. "Prepare to break orbit. Prepare for entry and touchdown."

For a second time in three hundred years, the computer hesitated. For the first time in three hundred years, it asked a question. *Are you malfunctioning?*

"Listen, you insubordinate piece of impure silicon, do as I say. I am *not* malfunctioning. And I want those coordinants hit exactly—on the button—right on top of the Capital rotunda. Got it?"

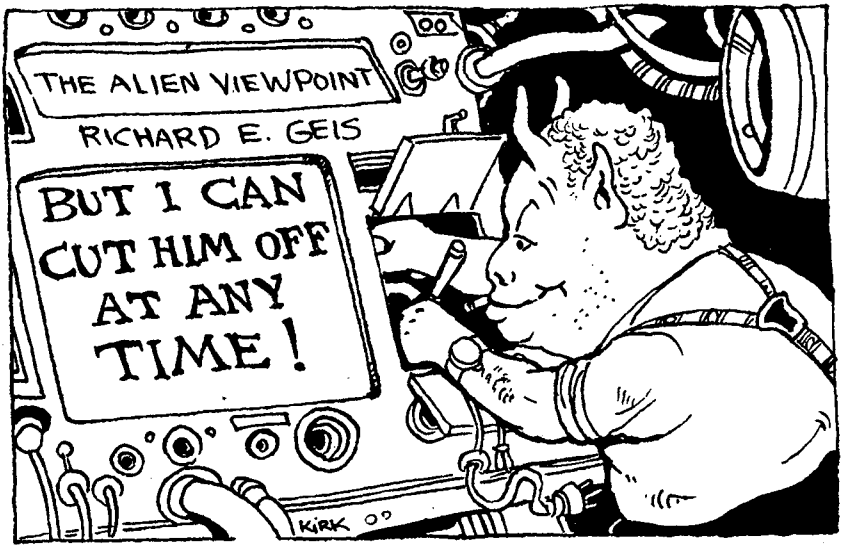
The computer had it. They broke orbit and started down. Though built in space and never designed to enter an atmosphere, a quick probability check indicated most of the equipment—armaments, power systems, basic ship's library—would make it to the surface with little damage. Only the control center—Helbent and most of the computer—would fuse from the heat. On impact, the ship would split like a coconut. From the wreckage—from his corpse—mankind would take away its quantum technological leap. Perhaps, during three hundred years, they could even build better ships. Helbent wished he could meet them. His duty demanded otherwise. From his bones, crucified atop capital hill, mankind would take salvation.

Helbent opened all communications channels to Earth, shouting into them.

"Whaaa-whooo, you lily-livered, sap-sucking gophers! It's me, the terrible Spacething! I'm a mean son of a bitch and I'm coming to get you! You better get your asses in gear because I ain't alone! There's a million more out there where I come from and in three hundred years we're gonna crack this planet like a peanut! Whaaa-whooo, you lily-livered. . . . . "

The outer hull began to glow, visible in the night sky over Earth. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



IN THE MAY, 1975 issue of his excellent magazine, KHATRU (1339 Weldon Av., Baltimore, MD 21211. $1.25 per issue.), Jeff Smith discusses a constant, nagging headache in the brain of the science fiction body electric.

Briefly, it comes down to this: Howcum the science fiction readers out there—*you*—don't buy much of the "best" and "quality" s-f that's being published?

Why do you, when push comes to shove and the hand reaches for the book or magazine on the rack, and the mind makes The Decision, howcum you buy mostly "bad" science fiction? Hah? You a bunch of unintelligent, ignorant, non-think clods? Why aren't you willing to spend your money on the "quality" that Robert Silverberg, for instance, likes to present in his new anthologies and collections?

You don't buy enough of Bob's choices, because his publishers are not coming back for much more, according to reports. So discouraged and pissed-off is Bob, as a matter of fact, that he has said out loud in front of large s-f convention audiences, that he is quitting science fiction.

Well, maybe not completely. . . .but mostly.

We can only smile sadly and say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so-long, Bob. It was nice reading you.

Jeff Smith thinks part of the problem is in the image science fiction has which lingers on from the 'deplorable' pulp days when the covers of the magazines were blatantly action-sex-danger oriented: the classic situation showing a bug-eyed monster clutching a fair white Earth girl in its tentacles/claws/pseudopods/whathave you while an earnest, heroic Earthman with blaster blasting, rescues her.

And, of course, the stories inside were written to match—the lowest, most shallow fiction, with cardboard characters and see-through plots abounding . . . Cliche piled upon cliche. Stereotypes running rampant on fields of colorful trite phrases and hackneyed situations.

The best opinion then of pulp s-f was: food for thought, maybe, but writing fit only for kids and a few thousand retarded or obsessed adults. (Buy the magazine, slip it under your sweater if the clerk wouldn't put it in a bag, slink home to read the awful stuff . . . Reading science fiction was only one small step above masturbation; it would rot the mind almost as fast.)

Jeff thinks that if only enough mature, intelligent readers were aware of the New science fiction, the really Good Stuff being written and published, and would try it (you'll like it) then all would be well and science fiction would flourish with its appropriate, educated, thinkingman readership.

Jeff thinks too much junk science fiction is being published, and that when the quality-oriented reader reaches (blindly, unguided) for to try some of that s-f stuff, he will like as not grab a Poul Anderson book, or a Clifford Simak book or something adequate and faintly juvenile and non-quality like that . . . and will judge all s-f by that sample, and thereafter stay away. Ahhh, wishes Jeff, if only those hypothetical quality readers—that vast, perceptive audience out there—could reach for a Delany book or a Russ book or a LeGuin book . . . THEN they'd be converts.

So I guess Jeff would secretly like to ban all junk s-f from the marketplace for, say, a year, while that keen-minded audience ate up the good stuff (junk reading not being available). Like a nutritionist deploring all the hamburger heavens and Twinkies on the shelves. . . .

But in a free marketplace there's all that junk—and Jeff Smith weeps. Many weep.

I laugh.

I know why all that "junk" is on the stands and why the quality-hunting readers stay away from science fiction. And it isn't because s-f has a bad image lingering from the pulp days.

It is because readers know what they want. They have excellent, sensitive antennae which sense the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

type of fiction in a book, and they have long memories. They've sampled enough to know, usually, who writes what and which company publishes what. They've learned the code, the subtle signals and words which betray (or flag) the "good" stuff from the "junk".

They buy mostly "junk".

YOU buy mostly "junk".

But you don't think it's junk. So whose value-system are we to use?

Science fiction can't use the "pulp-image" excuse anymore, to explain its lack of broad popularity and poor sales. For several years now, the colleges and universities have been unfused with an awareness of "quality" science fiction. Hundreds of courses and classes on science fiction are taught each year. Papers are written on it, books published on how to teach it. The teachers and professors have found another small vein of literary-popular-culture to mine and use. Science fiction has become property now, a territory, in academia, and as more and more teachers and professors stake out their acres and build their fences, s-f will become another cemetary, with hundreds of men and women desperately rooting in the ground for their livelihood. Still—once a group of people are dependent on a literary field for their income and status, they'll make it important and Significant. Science fiction is now Respectable.

Of course, as I noted in another column, writers sometimes tend to write for the approval of the professors . . . and the professors, sensing this catering, reward those writers with much attention and praise. It's a natural phenomenon. But in my view the headache comes down to a basic confusion of what *should* be with *what is*.

Many s-f writers, editors and fans think the great bulk of the s-f readership (the hard-core couple hundred thousand, the fringe million, and the once-a-year two-three million readers) *should* want to read and buy "quality" s-f.

The question shifts to what is true quality s-f.

Sturgeon's Law holds that 90% of all fiction is trash, junk, unworthy. The "quality" proponents assume that their stories and novels represent the 10% that is worthy.

But I would say that 90% of their Literary s-f is also crap. 10% is really well written . . . and 10% of the "junk" s-f is also really well done.

The Serious Writers in our field cannot stomach writing for readers. They consider plot and action and happy ending to be unrealistic, pandering, and unworthy of their talent and Image. They consider plotless, dull, pessimistic stories truly Literary . . . quality.

And they moan and cry piteously to the sky when the people who vote with the dollars keep electing the hated "junky" entertaining work to higher office.

Fiction, damn it, is story-telling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And good story-telling is entertaining. And entertainment is the primary duty/goal of the fiction writer. Even pretentious science fiction writers.

A quote by Tom Wolfe from his long essay, "The Painted Word" is appropriate here:

> 'First you do everything possible to make sure your world is antibourgeois, that it defies bourgeois tastes, that it mystifies the mob, the public, that it outdistances the insensible middle-class multitudes by light years of sublety and intellect—and then, having succeeded admirably, you ask with a sense of *See-what-I-mean*? outrage: look, they don't even buy our products! (Usually referred to as "quality art.")'

I wonder how many science fiction writers ever ask themselves as they write, "How can I structure this scene so that the dynamics of it will catch and keep the reader? How can I "play" this dialog to be honest and captivating and informative? How can I give the reader this necessary background without lessening my grip on his throat? How can I intensify this suspense? How can I make this character more lifelike and thus make his situation more believable, and the story more spell-binding?"

From what I read every day—damn few.

Berkley Publishing Corporation sends me all their pocketbook releases, every month. Not just their s-f. I appreciate that. I get to see and compare the writing levels of various genres . . . and I'm forced to admit that the professionalism of the mystery-detective writers is much higher than that of our science fiction writers.

CYBERNETICS, LOGIC, ROBOTICS,
AUTOMATA, COMPUTERS,
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
THE LOGIC PRESS©
CATALOG $1.00
260 GODWIN AVE.
WYCKOFF, N.J. 07481

For instance, MCQUAID by Shepard Rifkin (Berkley Z2841, $1.25). The writing is sharp, clean and convincing. Rifkin has talent and he uses his talent and skills to convince the reader that what he is reading is real.

The reader *knows* he's reading a story but he suspends his knowledge and "believes" in the world and the people of the author. WHY? Because in this case he wants to read about murder and sex and crime and catching the killer after a good, challenging struggle. And he wants the people and the action and the background in the story to be as true-to-life as possible, to be as convincing as possible.

He does not want the author to dance around shouting "Look at me!" and he doesn't want to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bored or lectured or made to feel dumb.

I think that 90% of the "quality" science fiction published is guilty of some or all of those writing sins.

The marvelous thing about MCQUAID is that Rifkin sneaks in a great deal of philosophy, a great deal of interesting and thought-provoking information, a lot of perceptive opinion and observation of people and the world, and he does it so well that the story would be a poor and anemic thing without it, so well that the reader relishes it, wants more, reads on as much for the content as for the action and sex and violence and suspense.

That's professionalism and talent and skill of a very high level. And if most of our talented science fiction writers could match it, could even approach it, could (or would) TRY for it—I'd be a very happy critic.

A few s-f writers do follow the Reader-First ethic. A very good current example of that is THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. Another is HIERO'S JOURNEY by Sterling E. Lanier. And I, WEAPON by Charles Runyon is good. (It is interesting to note that Runyon also writes in the mystery-detective genre.)

So my message to you readers—you who pay the freight—is do not be ashamed of reading entertaining "junk" science fiction. Don't be status-shamed into buying the latest unending, variation-on-a-theme by Samuel Delany because some Critic says it is Significant and a work of Art. DHALGREN is interesting for a hundred pages. After that it is a wordy bore.

So let's look for and reward the best damn "junk" science fiction we can find. If we do we'll end with something worthwhile—and a hell of a lot more satisfied readers and a lot more happy, better paid writers.

We might even end up with some hacks as good as a few of the old-timers like Shakespeare (a commercial playwright in his time), Dickens, A. Conan Doyle, Jules Verne, Balzac. . . .and many others who wrote superbly to please the reader, to entertain, and who were not at all self-consciously Artists or self-consciously concerned with Literature.

Literature is what lasts . . . and that's what people continue to pay their money to read, year after year after year. Those are the cold equations of writing.

* * *

If you've wondered what happened to Alter-Ego, he's still down in his dungeon/archives. I won't be visiting him too often, though. I slipped in a puddle of slime in a passageway and hurt my back, last time. I'm reluctant to risk that again.

I've set up a teleprinter and keyboards, so that whenever I flick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this switch—**flick**—the machines are on and we can communicate back and forth. Alter, of course, receives everything I write, but I can cut him off at any time. Right, Alter?

GHOD WILL GET YOU FOR THIS, GEIS. ONLY A COWARD WOULD RESORT TO THIS KIND OF CENSORSHIP. I CALL UPON THE READERS OF GALAXY TO PUT AN END TO MY IMPRISONMENT AND THE DENIAL OF MY FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS. GEIS IS JEALOUS OF MY POPULARITY. HE DID NOT HURT HIS BACK. HE—

Flick Enough of that. In fact, enough of this column for this time. I cannot resist noting that by the time this sees print the 1975 Hugo Awards will be known, and I'll know if I won the Best Fanzine Hugo again and/or the Best Fan Writer Hugo, for which I have been nominated again.

GIVE ME SOME CREDIT, GEIS. MY CONTRIBUTIONS HAVE MADE YOU THE BIG-NAME FAN YOU ARE TODAY. I DEMAND—

FLICK How did that switch get flicked back on? I could have sworn . . . Well, no matter. Tell you what. As soon as I find out from Australia (where the World Science Fiction Convention is being held this year) I'll devote a column of comment to the professional and fan Hugo Winners . . . and losers. ★

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

An Informal & Irreverent Science Fiction & Fantasy Journal Edited & Published by Richard E. Geis

Note: The Alien Critic has changed its name to SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. The magazine continues as before in every other respect.

Issue #14 features a long, eye-opening "inside" double interview with Philip Jose Farmer detailing his use of the Kilgore Trout by-line, his writing of VENUS ON THE HALF-SHELL, his hard-to-find sex novels, his troubles with publishers, his forthcoming books and his dark view of our planet's future.

Also: "Dancing on the Titanic" by Charles Runyon.

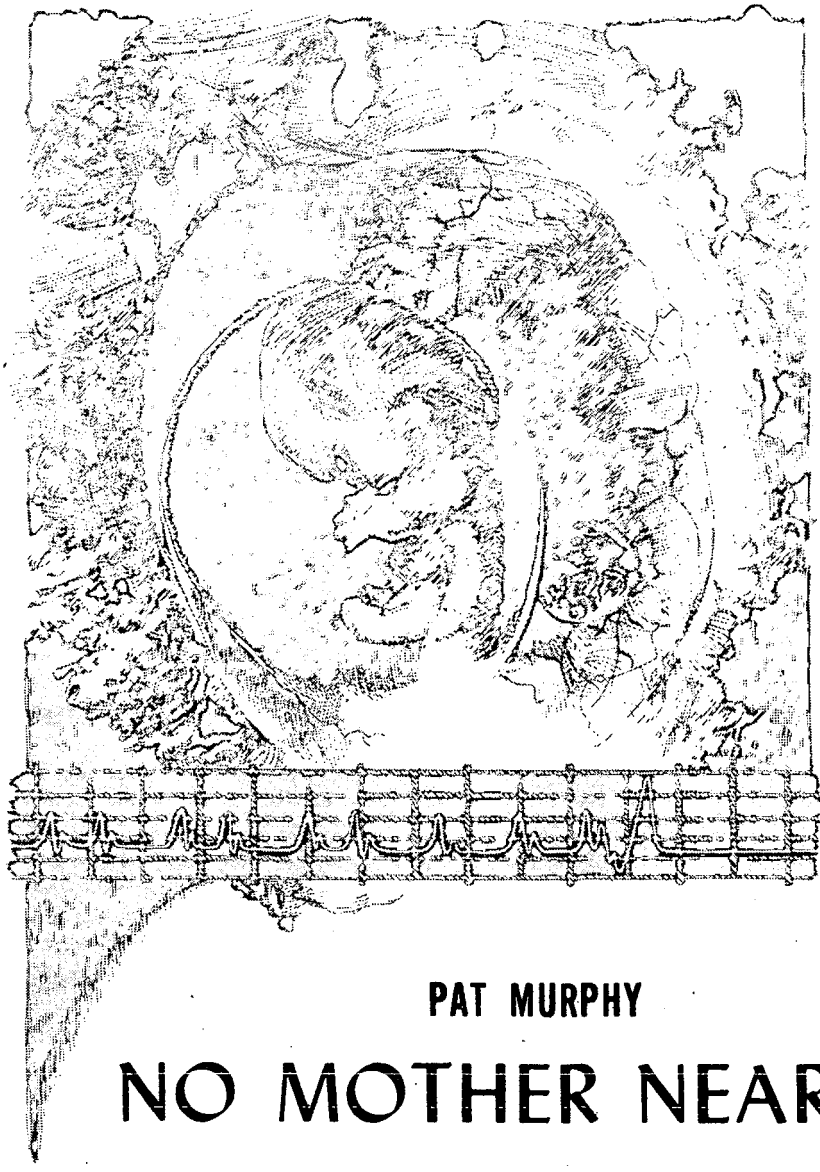
Letters by: Philip Jose Farmer, Jerry Pournelle, Bob Bloch, William Nolan, Don Wollheim, Ben Bova, many more.

Columnists: Larry Shaw, Ted White.
Every issue—The Archives: new book and story listings.

Quarterly/sample $1
year $4/two years. $7

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
P.O. Box 11408
Portland, OR 97211

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



PAT MURPHY

NO MOTHER NEAR

Listen to the hummm. . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON A MOONLESS NIGHT, on a starless night, she floated in the sea. The water was still and warm. She floated peacefully, moored by just a few lines. Nothing to do, nothing that had to be done.

She turned her head to tell Frank how happy she was; her head turned slowly, but something was wrong. Frank wasn't beside her. There was just more darkness. Warm darkness that pressed against her eyelids and tried to get into her mind. She was alone in the dark. And it wasn't really quiet; she could hear a hum, a steady hum. It frightened her, made her heart beat faster, no one would hear her scream, no one was near, no one was here. She lashed out with a fist but it moved slowly and weakly and there was nothing to hit, no one to fight, no one at all.

* * *

She woke. She lay curled on the bed, heart pounding. She opened her eyes to her apartment bedroom, lit with the thin, tired light of early dawn. She felt as insubstantial as the light, wraithlike and easily blown away. The light washed the colors out—her bedroom was a fine line-drawing of dimly recognizable furniture. She listened to the sounds of the freeway in the distance to reassure herself of her own being.

A dream again, just a dream. Was she passing though that stage in life when lonely women dream strange and lonely dreams and keep cats for company? It had been ten years since Frank, or anyone else, had shared her bed, yet she'd caught herself listening in the night for the sound of a heartbeat not her own. She'd never dreamed much at all—as a child she had, but as an adult there was Frank, then when the marriage ended, there was her work. She taught and worked with a steady passion, little time was left for anything else. She'd never floated in the sea at night; Frank was gone, long gone.

She shook her head and got up quickly. With her clothes, she donned her person: Dr. Alice Woods, a researcher as sensible as grey hair and grey skirts. She brushed her hair and leaned closer to the mirror to inspect the circles under her eyes. Two many nights of unfinished dreams.

The dreams had started a few months back. They weren't all the same, but they were all similar; lonely and threatening. She frowned and rubbed her eyes to rub out any trailing wisps of the dream.

She arrived at the university too early—no lectures to give today; the mail hadn't arrived yet; the night cleaning crew had gone and the day people hadn't arrived.

She sat in the coffee room, drinking hot tea, reading the front page of the morning paper. In the lower right of the page was her picture; she was standing at a podium. While three middle-aged women carrying signs proclaiming "Mothers for Motherhood" waved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their fists at her from the audience. The picture was captioned: "How does it feel to be the mother of the Plastic Mother? Story, page 6."

She didn't turn to page 6. She didn't feel up to the tales of her own humanity, inhumanity, or sub-humanity that were sure to be there. Besides, she could write the story by herself. "Dr. Alice Woods . . . married and divorced . . . Ph.D. at Harvard . . . Research in fetal development . . . the Plastic Mother is a common term for the artificial womb that Dr. Woods and her research team developed . . . This technique allows a fertilized egg to be implanted in a plastic container and raised through its full development . . . recent work involving human eggs has generated controversy . . . A new organization called Mothers for Motherhood. . . ."

Alice sighed and rested her head on her hand. Of course there would be a few interviews with members of the M.F.M. as well. " 'Raising a child in a cold metal box,' said one woman, 'is no substitute for a mother. I have three kids—had every one myself—and . . .' "

Three kids—give that woman the medal of honor. Betty Big-Breeder. Pops them out just like a toaster.

Alice shook her head, realizing she was getting upset with a product of her own imagination. Nothing worth wasting her energy on—just a few empty-headed housewives mouthing the same opinions. At least the newspapers showed some variety in the way they viewed her: she was an unnatural monster, a flaming feminist, or else God's gift to the scientific world and humanity—depending on the paper and the editor's mood. Alice glanced at the picture again—this paper was of the unnatural monster variety. She tossed it onto a chair and glanced at her watch; not quite enough time for a nap before work.

Picking up her cup, Alice stood and headed for her lab. All the hall was quiet—no typing noises, no one rattling glassware or running the ditto machine, no talking, no walking, no flushing toilets. Her ears hummed with the lack of sound; maybe it was just the blood rushing through her head. Everything was quiet except for the hum.

She shook her head, wide eyed. Another hangover from the night. All night the world had been quiet, too quiet. She'd had to strain her ears to hear the grumbling of the water pipes or the creaking of the building.

The door to the lab was open. The lights on. She could hear the charts of embryo heartbeat and movement humming, and the sound of rustling papers in the corner.

"Hello! Anyone here?"

"Morning, Alice." Cindy Bell, one of the two graduate students working on the project, looked out from around the corner behind the second row of tanks. "What are you doing here so early?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've got a crazy woodpecker that lives by my window. Every morning at about five he decides that my house is an affront to his personal sense of aesthetics, so he works on tearing it down singlehandedly. Sliver by sliver." Cindy laughed. "It's hopeless to sleep after five; I might as well be here."

"Well, we'll have matching circles under our eyes. Have you started checking the tanks yet?"

"I'm almost done."

"Good. How's number twelve? The heartbeat showed some irregularities yesterday."

Alice listened quietly to Cindy's explanation—the heartbeat had been fine all night.

"And Alice, did you see the paper this morning?" Cindy's question cut through the layer of drowsy inattention. Alice nodded.

"You made the first page."

Alice nodded again—when she spoke, her own voice startled her by coming out thick and dream-heavy. "I know. There are times when I feel like a nineteenth century anatomist—robbing graves in pursuit of knowledge while the mob howls for my blood, calling me butcher, grave robber, ghoul."

Cindy looked serious for a moment, the image of a young scientist in her white lab coat, but then she laughed. "Well we'll all be ghouls together then. Think–I'll just keep on counting the bodies." She turned back to the tanks.

Walking through the lab to her office, Alice remembered when she could grin and say "It'll all be okay. It'll all come up roses." Long, long ago. In pre-diluvian times. Now she was scarred by the battles for grant-money, drained by the fight to keep ahead. She set her coffee cup in the center of her functional green blotter, sat down in her functional green swivel chair. Then she grinned at her own thoughts. Bitter-old-woman thoughts. She was just a product of her environment: green blotter, green chair, bile-green mind.

Taking one last sip of tea, she flipped through the IN pile in the corner of her desk. Reports to read, charts to measure and record—she frowned when she hit a SPECIAL MEMO midway down the pile. She pulled it out: SPECIAL MEMO: PROJECT JUSTIFICATION.

"What?!" She startled herself by saying the word out loud. She skimmed the memo. "To Dr. A. Wood; From Division Head Jason Daven." It beat around the bush in the best university bureaucratic fashion: greetings, hedging, one or two lines of evasion, then the meat—" due to publicity and controversy arising from the project, the project goals and justification will come up for general discussion and review at the next board meeting, in one month . . . "

Alice grabbed the phone. "Daven's office? Dr. Woods calling . . . He'd damn well better speak to me." Dear, dear, and my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heavens. Now she'd startled the poor little secretary.

"Dr. Daven will speak with you now."

"Hello?"

"Alright, Jake, what's this crap about a special memo?"

"Now, Alice, have you read it? I thought that it was clear . . . "

"Clear! Sure it's clear. I justified this project right, left, upside down, sideways, inside out and five ways from the middle last year. It was considered and reconsidered then, when it was taken through the board review."

"Well, there's been a lot of public opinion raised against the project since then and I thought . . . "

"Public opinion! What does that have to do with anything?"

"Now, Alice, maybe we should talk this over when you've cooled off some. I don't like to see anyone upset . . . "

"Then don't send out absurd memos."

" . . . but after all, Alice, it's just a reconsideration. Now why don't you call me back when you've cooled off a little."

Dial tone.

Alice hung up the receiver and fumed. That pompous, over-stuffed, over-paid, sub-human, moldy-minded . . .

"Whew! Smells of brimstone in here. You look like you're designing some unspeakable torture in the name of science" Russell Scott lounged in her doorway, somehow making his lanky frame fit in the space.

"No. In the name of revenge."

"Oh? Any poor fool I know? Or maybe I should say knew."

"Our beloved Division Head, Jake the Snake." Alice glowered. "Reconsideration. I don't have time to write progress reports and push papers now."

"Don't worry, it'll all blow over. Reconsideration," he mused, "just the thing to get one's adrenalin flowing in the morning." Russ grinned at her then sauntered into the lab.

Ah, youth. Alice sipped her cold tea and made a face. Beset by enemies—the M.F.M. outside the walls, Jake Daven inside. Project justification, paper work, progress report—a waste of her time. Russ was right—it would all blow over. But her time and energy wasn't so abundant that she could squander it on this.

She pulled out a pad of paper and a copy of the original project justification. This type of bureaucratese was automatic now: facts, figures, impressive graphs, justification and future value for mankind all tied up in a neat package. She set to work.

Long after lunchtime, Alice put down the pen and stretched. First draft done. She stood and wandered into the lab. Cindy and Russ were gone on an afternoon coffee break, but the lab hummed on alone.

She moved to check tank 3. Their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

oldest fetus was here—2 months. She checked heartbeat and nutrient flow, both fine. The charts were running and humming and the tank was in perfect operating condition.

One newspaper report had described the tank as a "washing machine gone mad with dials and switches and charts . . ." The tank was about the same size as a washing machine, and it had the same cool white finish on the outside, so maybe that was an accurate description. She was so close to the project that it was hard to see them as anything but—tanks. Artificial wombs.

Alice put her hand on the smooth metal side and felt the vibration of the chart's hum, the warmth of the nutrient flow, maybe the ticking of a tiny heart. It was dark inside the tank where the plastic womb lay. She knew—a warm darkness that pressed close and tried to creep in where it wasn't wanted. So quiet. No sight . . . no sound save the hum of the chart and the wash of the nutrient solution around the embryo and through her veins. A throbbing silence. Warm rest and peace with a hum in the background. Floating in the dark with nothing to do . . .

She snapped awake. Falling into daydreams on a sunny day—she needed more sleep. Suddenly she felt tired, worn to the bone. Maybe coming in the day after the incident in lecture had been a mistake. But someone had to push the papers, write progress reports in a language Jake Daven could understand. Someone had to protect the project and fight the battles with enemies inside and outside the university. Alice sighed and pushed herself away from the tank. To the coffee room for a very late lunch.

She walked silently down the hall, her old bones stiff, her old *mind* stiff. The students in the hall smiled and she nodded in return. It was only the reconsideration that made her feel so tired and old.

Once, an enterprising young reporter had looked a little too carefully into Dr. Wood's background in preparation for an interview. He asked her: "Does the fact that you once lost a child at birth have anything to do with your view of the need for fetal research and an artificial womb?" She had looked at him so hard and long that he looked as if he might welcome an artificial womb to swallow him up and put him out of sight. The death of that child had broken her marriage. Frank had sympathized for a while, but he couldn't break through the memories of a child that had never lived. Instead of fighting the memories, she'd fought Frank. She wrapped herself in the ghost of a child that had never lived long enough to die. So the marriage died.

And she still remembered the cold feeling of an empty body, empty arms, no child, a cold loss that invaded her heart and froze her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the inside out.

She wasn't sure what she'd finally replied to the over-eager young reporter. Maybe something simple like "no." Luckily, the papers didn't want in-depth interviews of her anymore—they just wanted interviews long enough to confirm their image of her. It eliminated a number of embarrassing questions.

It was a worthwhile project. Fetal processes could best be studied in the controlled environment of an artificial womb. She wasn't a ghoul or a grave robber. All eggs and sperm were donated by people who believed in the project. Her own eggs, Cindy's eggs, Russ's sperm; students from her classes and old friends and colleagues had donated. She wasn't a ghoul; no one had the right to complain.

She turned wearily into the coffee room and poured herself a cup of coffee. Living on coffee and paperwork, she thought. Russ and Cindy were at a table; they made room for her.

"Hey, you really look beat."

Alice twisted her mouth into what could pass for a smile. "Restating the obvious always exhausts me." Surrounded by the young, she always look beat, she thought. Almost all the people in the coffee room were many years her juniors. Students, grad students, and bright young professors—so many of her contemporaries were gone.

"That lecture yesterday must have really taken it out of you."

"More the aftermath that the battle. Bowing to public opinion in the person of Jake Daven and rejustifying our existence. The first draft's done at least."

"Done! You deserve a rest then." Cindy turned to Russ. "Hey, you, *our* rest's just about up. Ready for another round?"

Russ downed his coffee. "Work. I'm surrounded by the Protestant Work Ethic. Maybe I'll renounce God and become a happy sluggard."

Cindy grinned at Alice. "We've still got to finish the tests of reflexes on the one-month fetus in tank 6." She stood and pulled Russ to his feet. "Come on, you sluggard."

Alice watched them toss their cups carelessly into the trash and hurry from the room.

Alice leaned back in her chair and listened to the humming of the hive: the murmurs of the few people left in the room, the humming of the refrigerator unit across the hall, the rattle of typewriters, the rustling noises of hurrying people. Sound washed across her mind in a continuous hum, something was wrong, a steady hum, a hive of bees with something missing, persistent hum.

Daydreaming again, she caught herself, preoccupied with sound. Nothing she could think of, nothing she could catch, but the hum. She gulped at her coffee and burned her tongue. Bone weary and daydreaming, the coffee would do no good

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for that. Maybe she'd rest a bit before going back to work; first draft done on the report, the rest could wait a bit. There was a couch in the women's room. She'd lie down a while, and go back to work fresh. It was cool in the air-conditioned building; she could forget the warm and pressing darkness that had plagued her in the night. She should have forgotten already. She'd never remembered her dreams before. An old woman's memory—Alice frowned—an old woman's nap. She stood to leave.

"Alice. Wait." Old Jake Daven, she thought. Dr. Daven hurried from the counter with a coffee cup in his hand. "Just wanted to talk to you for a minute."

"A minute's all I have, Jake. Time's running out." Ten years ago she'd never have predicted Jake for division head. He'd never had the wisdom, skill, or patience of many others. But now the others were gone—retired—and Jake looked a division head—thick-waisted, grey-headed, black-suited. Empty headed Jake was still here and time was running out for her too.

"I'm glad I caught you. I hope you've cooled down some since this morning. I'm sure it won't take you long to write up a progress report and present it to the board."

Yes, she'd cooled down some. Cool as ice. A regular frosty old woman, frozen to the marrow and ready to melt, this summer day. "Yes, Jake, the report's done."

"Good." Jake looked more like he was trying to soothe himself than her. Good Jake, he was saying to himself, it was all right. "I just wanted you to understand. The board got a petition signed by five hundred women. All objecting to your research. So we just have to call a reconsideration, at least until the newspapers stop talking about it. Can't have all this upset, you understand—might even get the government involved."

Five hundred women—you could get people to sign anything by standing in front of a supermarket and looking respectable. ("Of course you've heard about the terrible research going on at the University? Well it's just terrible and we plan to put a stop to it.") And the government. That's right—Jake's pet project involved a government grant—the work he did to be sure he was still considered a scientist. Yes, she understood . . . now if only he'd let her rest. Get away from the hum and find out what was missing. She nodded. "Yes, Jake, I understand."

"Good." He looked relieved now. An angry top researcher calmed down—all in a day's work. "I'll let you go now. Always busy, right?" He was a little too hearty. She thought he even looked embarrassed by his own over-acting.

"Right, Jake." She turned and walked to the door, dropping her coffee cup deliberately in the trash and walking slowly out, careful lest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her fragile, still-frozen bones break, as if she were a fetus with still-soft bones.

She pushed the door to the women's room gently, as if her wrist would bend if she pushed too hard. She lay on the couch on her back and closed her eyes. So soft, so warm. She could thaw and rest here. The room seemed as warm as her house at night. And the refrigeration unit next door hummed soothingly.

Hum. After she'd lost the baby, she'd gone to see a psychiatrist. Frank had insisted. She couldn't remember the man's face, that was blurred by time. But she could remember his office. Too warm, with a chair too soft (he was too modern for a couch) and a clock that hummed . . . it annoyed the hell out of her, that hum.

"Well, Alice, try to describe what feels wrong to you." (Hum.)

"I . . . something'smissing . . ."

"Yes." (Hum.)

"Something's wrong. It's all so empty; no more but there should be more, and . . . " She shook her head at the futility of trying to describe her feelings.

"Yes, Alice?" (Hum.) Every remark was punctuated by the clock's steady hum.

She looked at his hands, soft and white and clasped quietly on his desk, young-man-on-his-way-up, listening to pain and saying "Yes." next he'd tell her that many women felt that way and that . . .

"Alice, many women feel that way after losing a child. Just talk it out and . . . "

She picked up the humming clock that sat on the corner of his dest, big numbers proclaiming 2:30, and smashed it against the desk. She cracked the face and dented the desk, but the hum went on. She threw the clock to the floor and stamped on it with an ineffectual heel. She'd stamp on it like an insignificant bug. But the hum went on.

"Now, Alice . . . " He was beside her now . . . "Many women feel that way, but that's no reason to . . . "

She kicked his shin and wrenched her elbow from the pasty hand that was closing on it. She stooped and picked up the clock, swung it around her head, and hurled it across the room. It travelled in slow motion. She watched fascinated—it flew across the room in a slow arc and the plug pulled out. The hum stopped. Stopped. And the darkness quit pressing so close.

She opened her eyes. The refrigeration unit next door still hummed. Her knees were pressed against her chest. One hand was up to her mouth, the other, close at her side. Her chin was down. Her lab coat was twisted awkwardly and she felt cramped, like she'd been lying in a space too small for her. She straightened slowly and lay on her back again.

That wasn't the way the visit to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the young psychiatrist had gone. She'd listened to the doctor politely, endured the humming of his clock, ignored the platitudes he'd spouted, walked calmly away from his office, and never returned. No violence, no fuss. She just hadn't been able to describe the longing, aching, empty feeling of a childless womb, no child to carry, all she could say was an empty feeling, something missing. She was hollow; strike her and she'd echo. Something missing—like she'd felt in her dreams, like she felt now . . . no not now. Now the feeling was like something gone that had never been there, rather than something gone, just out of reach. Now it was like yearning after something that never was. The other she'd felt up til . . . up til the clock stopped humming. So strange, so strange.

Alice stood and straightened her skirt. She stretched. She didn't feel tired; she pushed the door quite sure her wrist wouldn't bend or break, stepped out into the hall confident her bones wouldn't melt. Amazing what a short nap could do. She felt reborn.

She even smiled at Cindy and Russ as she walked into the lab. They stood by tank 3; both looking worried. She felt like throwing their own words back—don't worry; we'll weather it.

"What are you two looking so worried about now."

Cindy didn't return the smile. "Tank 3. No changes in anything. Hormone levels, fine. Temperature, normal. But the fetus died."

The chart registered a smooth line for the heartbeat. The hum of the chart sounded loud in the lab. In the tank, the nutrient flow through the fetus's veins had stopped. The fetus had died and it heard the hum of the chart no more.

Alice knew what she'd find by the notation for tank 3 in the record book. She knew she'd look it up later that night after she'd shed her Dr. Woods assurance and cried. The fight was over—she'd fought the M.F.M. and Jake and would have won; the child had fought the darkness and lost.

She'd fought the wrong fight. It was always easier to fight outer enemies—she'd found it easier to fight Frank than the cold emptiness, easier to fight Jake than the darkness.

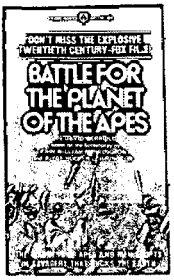
The project would end. When Susie and other donors began to wake from troubled dreams, when each fetus died a mysterious death, the project would end.

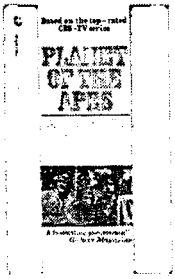
It was lonely in the tank with the dark pressing close. And something was missing, a mother's heartbeat, breathing, warm mind unconsciously near. Alone in a tank. The mother's mind was near enough to grab, but not near enough to keep the darkness from pressing too close.

She would look it up. She didn't know who donated the sperm, but she knew whose was the egg. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE AWARD LIBRARY
Strange New Worlds Of

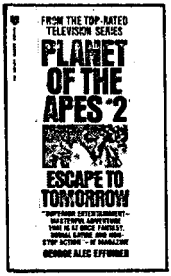




Don't miss a single novel based on the fantastic *Planet of the Apes* motion pictures. Written by today's top s.f. authors—John (Brak the Barbarian) Jakes, Hugo Award winner David Gerrold, and Jerry Pournelle, winner of the J. W. Campbell, Jr. Memorial Award.

BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES
David Gerrold AN1139—95¢
ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES
Jerry Pournelle AN1240—95¢
CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES
John Jakes AN1241—95¢

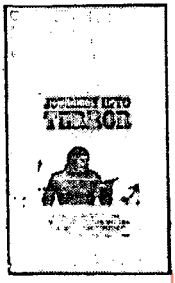
PLUS...



All-new *Planet of the Apes* adventures by George Alec Effinger!

MAN THE FUGITIVE
Two humans are trapped in the incredible Ape world
AN1373 95¢

ESCAPE TO TOMORROW
Men and Apes battle for supremacy.
AN1407 95¢



JOURNEY INTO TERROR
A race to escape the savage Planet of the Apes.
AN1436 95¢

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

F SCIENCE FICTION
antasy And Imagination

THE BEST FROM GALAXY VOLUME II
A compilation of the very best tales from the pages of America's foremost science fiction magazine. Includes stories by Harlan Ellison, R. A. Lafferty, Theodore Sturgeon and many more.
AQ1261 $1.25

MEN AND MACHINES
Robert Silverberg edited this superlative collection of science fiction masterworks by today's most famous authors. "Great variety... Recommended!"—*Locus*
AN0765 95¢

HER TITLES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

RITHIAN TERROR, Damon Knight. AN1253 95¢
BOOK OF RACK THE HEALER, Zack Hughes. AN1149 95¢
E WIZARD OF ANHARITTE, Colin Kapp. AN1156 95¢
E SOUL STEALERS, Charles Huntington. AS1044 75¢
HTMARE ON VEGA 3, Charles Huntington. AS1045 75¢
INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, ack Finney. AN1125 95¢
TTERNS OF CHAOS, Colin Kapp. AN1118 95¢
BEST OF IF VOLUME II, Editors of *If*. AQ1360 $1.25
ENDS OF TIME, Robert Silverberg, Editor. AN0778 95¢
URE TIMES THREE, Rene Barjavel. AS0743 75¢

RUSH YOUR ORDER TODAY!
IT'S EASY WITH THIS HANDY CLIP-OUT COUPON.

WARD BOOKS, 350 Kennedy Drive,
lauppauge, N.Y. 11788

lease send me the books indicated below by book number:

_____ _____ _____ _____

any of my selections are out of stock, please supply the following
lternate choices: _____ _____

lame _____

ddress _____

ity _____ State _____ Zip _____

dd 25¢ for postage and handling for one book, 35¢ for two or three books. We pay postage
all orders of four books or more. Send remittance in U.S. or Canadian funds. Sorry,
C.O.D.s.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Spider Robinson

Options, Robert Sheckley, Pyramid, 158 pp., $1.25

The Proud Enemy, F. M. Busby, Berkley Medallion, 187 pp., $0.95

The Other Glass Teat, Harlan Ellison, Pyramid, 397 pp., $1.50

Partners In Wonder, Harlan Ellison, Pyramid, 288 pp., $1.50
$1.50

The Liberated Future, ed. Robert Hoskins, Fawcett Crest, 304 pp., $1.50

Ecological Fantasies, Cy A. Adler, Delta, 350 pp., $2.95

Orbit 16, ed. Damon Knight, Harper & Row, 271 pp., $8.95

Homeward And Beyond, Poul Anderson, Doubleday, 204 pp., $6.95

Does Anyone Else Have Something Further To Add?, R. A. Lafferty, Scribners, 273 pp., $6.95

HALF A RACK, half a rack, half a rack onward; into the Valley Of Books strolls the Spider. Turkeys to the right of me, turkeys to the left of me, here and there an old friend looking embarrassed at the company he's keeping these days (" . . . and the pig got up and slowly walked away."). But somewhere beyond all these Jacqueline Susanns and Harold Robbinses and (*o di immortales!*) Norman Mailers, lies a magic land I know of old, the watering hole from which over the years I have sipped untold gallons of psychedelic nectar, whose taste confers visions: The SF Section.

What it is, you see, is the old man-in-the-street caper (as opposed to the Old Man In The Street Caper, which is an insurance fraud and an altogether different proposition). The stated purpose of this column is to aid the man or woman standing in the SF section with a few spare surplus dollars to invest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them wisely. Only a fraction of the books offered there to you, the hypothetical consumer, are the brand-new, hot-off-the-presses stuff I get in the mail—and I cannot assume that you are a card-carrying Fan, familiar with everything printed in the last thirty years (although I often tend to anyhow), nor are my own credentials in that area impeccable.

And so it came to pass that that editor fellow, the Baen of my existence these days, called me up a few days ago, and after we got past the unpleasant part about this column being two weeks late, he suggested that I *become* my assumed audience—that is, stagger down to my local bookstore, harvest there whatever fruits struck my fancy, and send the tab to Galaxy. This is something like the old "naked in Neiman-Marcus with a checkbook" wheeze, and I agreed at once. Disguising myself as you, I hied me to the nearest paper palace (which shall remain nameless until they start picking up on my hints about The Ol' Plugola), and fell upon the above-mentioned SF section like the wolves upon the centerfold. Over the next few months I'll be covering the goodies I gathered in that single raid, and there are four in this installment alone. Onward.

* * *

When I sat down to read *Options*, Bob Sheckley's first novel in eight years, I happened to have just finished explaining to my friend and neighbor Dan Parker why he ought not to buy *Dhalgren* (a service I'd have done you folks too if Lester Del Rey hadn't already done so, definitively, in *Analog*). I therefore went through at least three quarters of *Options* in a state of clinical schizophrenia unequalled since my three-headed grandfather punched himself in the mouth.

Because Sheck did almost every single one of the things Delany did wrong in *Dhalgren,* committed the same unpardonable sins, frustrated the same reasonable expectations—and made me love it.

Deliriously illogical background, brazenly proclaimed inconsistencies, a boring protagonist, shifting premises, blatant self-indulgence, aimless plot, pointless "motivations," even the final juvenility of the author inserting himself bodily into the work to comment on it—the only ones he missed were the ostentatious punctuation tricks and the begin - and - end - in - the - middle - of - a-sentence gag.

Sheckley cheerfully acknowledges all these things; in fact, they seem to be . . . er . . . the point.

Now, Lester said something to the effect that in a story where absolutely *anything* can happen, who the hell cares what does? I agree, I agree—and yet somehow that sumbitch Sheckley kept me turning pages until there weren't any more, whereupon I wished there were.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This initially confounded me.

It was, as I say, about three quarters of the way through that I explained it to myself: you can't judge a pie in the face by the same standards you would apply to breast of guinea hen under glass. You don't use the same critical tools on Spike Jones that you do on Beethoven.

All writers, it seems, dream secretly of writing stream-of-consciousness stuff, on the theory that the inside of their head is the most fascinating place in the world of literature—I myself have resisted only because I'm not yet prestigious enough to *sell* such crap. But if you are going to write off the top of your head, the only way in the world you'll get away with it is to be hilarious.

Sheckley is hilarious, funnier than the missionary position. His book is an exploding cigarette, a velvet banana, a bearded tractor, a Presbyterian platypus, a polka-dot baseball glove, a Chinese air raid, and/or none or all of the above. It will probably make your mind soggy. If that sounds good to you, you'll like it. If not, not, and to hell with you.

Send a mutant to Ibiza today: pick up Sheckley's *Options*.

* * *

If you haven't read F.M. Busby's *To Cage A Man* by now, your name is Mudd. Run out and get a copy, if only so that you can properly appreciate Busby's entirely satisfactory sequel, *The Proud Enemy*.

Not that you must; *Enemy* stands on its own. But knowing the background will raise it that one notch from "good" to "excellent" for you. The only faint, lingering objection I had to *Cage* when I read it a year or so ago was that the alien Demu seemed like cardboard villains from Space Opera Central Casting, performing savage atrocities on humans and others in a rather clichéd Master Race syndrome. *Enemy* sinks that gripe, with a beautiful explanation of the Demu arrogance that makes cultural sense.

To his magnificent character Barton, the man who *always* doubts the unproven, Busby adds a host of delightfully real, human people (perhaps some of the friendly aliens are a bit too human too, but what the hell?), and leads them through an exciting series of events, culminating in one of those tomato-surprise endings that makes you wonder why you weren't expecting it.

There are flaws in the book—the planetary defenses of Sisshain are just a bit too feeble to be plausible (even granting that it's not actually lived on), the Demu's most sacred secret place just a bit too easily burgled. Profound this book ain't exactly, but it's exciting, entertaining, well-thought-out and carefully crafted. It reminds me subtly of my own first novel, forthcoming from the same publishers whenever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finish the damned thing.

In other words, you'll love it.

★ ★ ★

The next two yummies I picked from the rack were a pair of Harlans, both reprints, but each in a different sense. This is no surprise—Harlan sells a piece the way some folks sell the Brooklyn Bridge: over and over again. Which is a break for you.

If, for instance, you happened not to be a regular reader of the *L.A. Free Press* (don't be silly—none of the Freep's readers are regular) between Feb. 13, 1970 and March 26, 1971, or of *Rolling Stone* on May 11 and 25 of 1972, you might have missed the columns which make up *The Other Glass Teat,* inevitably-named sequel to *The Glass Teat.* Thanks to Pyramid, this mission can now be rectified.

What's a book of television criticism, and three-to-five year old TV criticism at that, doing in an SF book review? Well, for one thing, SF is occasionally and trenchantly discussed, since Harlan can't very well help but be what he is—for instance, he dissects with magnificent skill the execrable "SF" TV-movie, *The Love War,* which still surfaces on late-night TV today. For another thing, a lot of the ostensibly straight television examined by Dr. Ellison sure sounds like science fiction to me.

Enough justifying—what the book is *like* is, as the cover copy states, a series of Drano martinis. Or a butane lighter refilled with napalm. Or any metaphor you like for a succession of words that are corrosive, explosive, and incisive all at the same time. The stirring saga of Harlan's appearance on *The Dating Game* is alone worth the price of admission (they ended up burning the tape), and the "Dear Mom" column written immediately after the Kent State massacre seems chiseled in stone by gnashing teeth. Harlan does not merely criticize what he saw on the trube—he *extrapolates,* to show its effects on the thousands and thousands who suck up that pap every day. Is this not what SF is all about?

Also, a complete Ellison script for *The Young Lawyers* is included (a quick course in script-mechanics), along with a blow-by-blow on how the script was castrated in production.

★ ★ ★

The other Ellison is a reprint (from 1971) of a collection which Avon foolishly let go. Its title is apt: *Partners In Wonder.* It comprises thirteen stories and a batch of ape cartoons written by Harlan in collaboration with the likes of Ben Bova, Bob Sheckley, Avram Davidson, Ted Sturgeon, Joe Hensely, William Rotsler, A.E. Van Vogt, Henry Slesar, Samuel R. Delany, Algis Budrys, Robert Silverberg, Keith Laumer and Roger Zelazny. If that ain't worth a buck and a half, I don't know what is.

Everything in the book is worth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reading at least once (with the exception of the Ellison-Rotsler King Kong cartoons, which are uniformly dumb), and magnificent is not too strong a word for the best of them. Ellison/Sheckley's "I See A Man Sitting On A Chair, And The Chair Is Biting His Leg" is a classic, as are Ellison/Bova's "Brillo" (which nearly became an ABC-TV series), Ellison/Silverberg's "The Song The Zombie Sang," and "Street Scene" (in which Harlan and Keith Laumer couldn't agree on an ending and so offer you two). In addition you get the usual Ellison introductions, info not only on the writers themselves but on the fine art of collaboration.

A Best Buy.

★ ★ ★

So much for the ones I picked off the rack. Now we come to The Things That Grew In The Mailbox. The first of these, happily, is a genuine gumdrop: a scattergun collection of true classics in the field.

In *The Liberated Future*, Robert Hoskins has assembled a pile of stories as diverse as they are delightful, definitive examples of several different *kinds* of SF. There are, for instance, Poul Anderson's immortal "Sam Hall"; Cyril Kornbluth's "The Little Black Bag"; Sheckley's "Street of Dreams, Feet of Clay" (his name does seem to keep coming up, doesn't it?); and Ursula K. Leguin's "A Trip To The Head," to name but a few. I "didn't like" some of them—that is, I don't much care for that kind of story—but all are honestly and well written.

Never mind that the title and ostensible theme of the collection —"Liberation"—can be made to cover all these stories only by stretching the premise to the point where, plucked, it would emit a G two octaves above middle C. Who the hell cares? If faking a "theme" made it easier for Hoskins to sell Fawcett on the notion of publishing these goodies, then what matter if sings aren't always what they theme? (sorry.)

Other authors represented are R.A. Lafferty, Katherine MacLean, Henry Kuttner, Dean R. Koontz, Joe L. Hensley, Barry Malzberg, Anne McCaffrey and William Tenn. If you've got a friend which you don't know what he likes but you wanna turn him on to SF—or if you want to expand your own horizons—try this.

★ ★ ★

Let's drop fiction for a second, and get into fact. Science fact, or, to be precise, ecological fact.

Everybody knows that city air will kill you even quicker than country whiskey, right? Everybody knows that man is destroying the life-giving oxygen in his atmosphere in ever-increasing amounts. Everybody knows Lake Erie is dead. Everybody knows those damned oil spills are destroying our oceans. Everybody. . . .

Now, you can't say flat out that anything "everybody knows" *must*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be wrong. For instance, everybody knows that Gerry Ford has the intellectual acumen of a prenatal woodchuck, and that *is* true. But the phrase ought to make you suspicious.

And so, in *Ecological Fantasies* (subtitled "Death By Falling Watermelons"), Cy A. Adler presents a raft of evidence that doesn't jibe too well with what "everybody knows" about ecology. He cites, for example, studies which find no connection between lung cancer or emphysema and living in a city; which find more edible fish in Lake Erie than in any other Great Lake; which find no perceptible degradation of world oxygen levels over the past thirty years; which show that oil spills in the open ocean (at least) are converted by bacteria into food for marine organisms. The man offers hard evidence—I do not say proof—against these and a dozen other alleged ecological catastrophes.

However, although I am in accord with Adler's stated purpose ("A defense of innovation, science, and rational approaches to environmental problems"), I must recommend you take this book with a football-size grain of salt. Much of Adler's reasoning strikes me as specious, some of his sources are not what I'd call impeccable, and at best he sometimes ends only by proving that things may not be *quite* so bad as some people say. The book appears to be aimed at the liberals who are dying for an excuse to dump this ecology crap and do the world some less expensive good.

But if you read it with your Built In Shit Detector at maximum gain you'll find it one of the most fact-packed and background-informative books since Ben Bova's *The New Astronomies* (Mentor Books), which it it no way resembles. Check it out, fellow eco-freaks. Hear the other side; they are not all villains.

* * *

Back to fiction.

I scarcely know what to say about *Orbit 16*, which is my usual reaction to avatars of that series. Damon has a knack for collecting precisely that type of SF story which tends to give me a pain just beneath the small of the back. You know, that think-piece stuff that's good on poetic prose and literary allusion and like heavy metaphors and typographical tricks to induce mood and gallons of allegory and mostly what the judges for the first John W. Campbell *Memorial* Award (as opposed to the plain-old John W Campbell Award that You lovely people gave me last year) were pleased to call "recognition of the fallen state of Man." And which *isn't* exactly strong on stuff like characterization and plot and an actual ending and all that hopelessly square stuff.

This is, of course, a generalization. I have read many fine stories in *Orbit* collections. But there have been many, many, many stories in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Orbit collections. I guess a lot of you must like 'em—they sell like hell. But I don't mind admitting I have failed to understand or enjoy most of 'em myself.

And even if you are an *Orbit* fan, I'm not sure you'll like Number Sixteen. It ain't a total loss, but a lot of the stories are manifestly by newcomers, first-sales or nearly so, and the Jesse Miller entry is the first he ever wrote and not a patch on "Pigeon City."

Worse, Damon leavens the stories with anecdotes and funnies that largely lay there and die. There is, for instance, a remake of Victor Borge's One-Up English ("Anytwo for elevennis?") called "The Little Lexicon For Time Travelers," of which "Wasaac Asimov" and "Ante Toasties" are entirely enough examples.

I may not know what I like, but I know Art (a hammernosed old Serbo-Croation who cobbles my snowshoes for me), and he wouldn't like this book. You might, but I couldn't guarantee it.

* * *

One last toke and then I've got to be getting home, but I couldn't miss a chance to alert you to a thoroughly meaty book, dripping with juices and delicately marbled. All I really need to say, of course, is that it's a Poul Anderson collection; but since you may conceivably have been suffering from rectocranial inversion for the last few decades, I'll redundantly state that *Homeward And Beyond* contains some of the best stories I've read in this or any year.

A couple are SF only because Poul says so and who's going to argue with him? A couple are distinctly minor—"Wings Of Victory," for example, is notable only because it is the first story concerning the Ythrians of Poul's almost-Hugo-winner *People Of The Wind*.

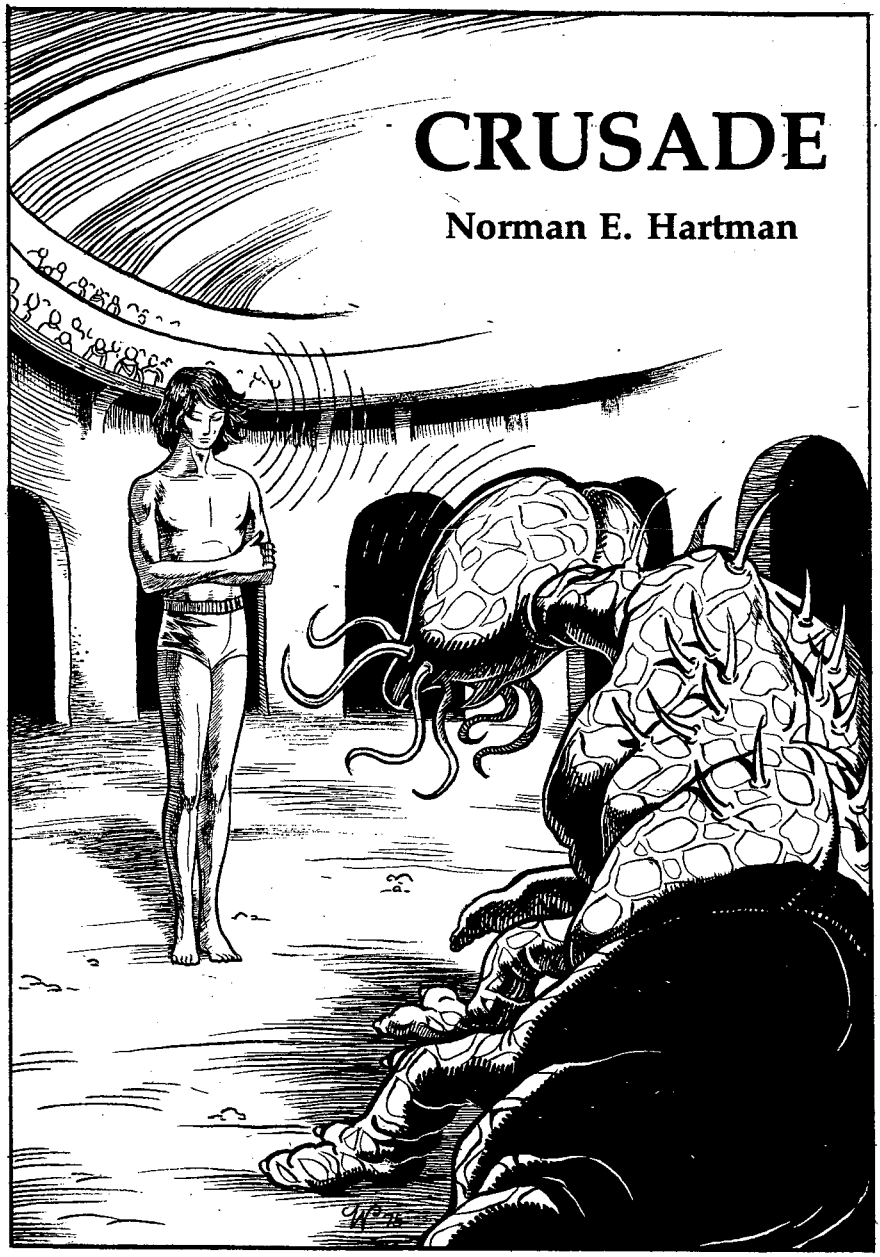
But "The Long Remembering," "Murphy's Hall" (a collaboration with his lovely wife Karen), "Peek! I See You!" (Christ, what a title), "Goat Song," and most particularly "The Pirate" and the incredibly tender and moving "The Peat Bog" are so damn good they had me babbling aloud as I read them (don't b'lieve me, ask my wife Jeanne). They range from hard-science to no-science, and include Harlanesque introductions by Poul that are a treat. Don't miss this collection—it's the dromedary's drawers.

Only one "mini-review" ("tome-capsule"?) this month:

Has Anyone Else Got Anything Further To Add? by R.A. Lafferty. You either like Lafferty or you don't—I do. This here's a bunch of typical Lafferty. There you go. (I find sixteen shaggy-dog stories in a row a little heavy, but you could maybe read it intermittently over the next year.)

See you next month; Near as I can guess the next column's due out about Thanksgiving—maybe we can carve up some turkeys for ya. ...★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The armies of Earth were invinceable—for who can defeat a True Believer?

FAINT AND FAR AWAY, the dim memory of a warning bell. Dean stirred, uneasy. The sky was blue, a few scattered clouds, fleecy-white. In the meadow, glints of gold where flowers clustered. Beyond stood trees, cool and green. A little longer to rest, then he would seek the shade. Find a bubbling stream from which to drink. But for now the suns were warm . . .

* * *

Two suns! Instantly he was awake, the warm lush meadow replaced by plastic and cold steel. The palm of his hand hit the transmitter button, swept across the row of switches that armed the scout's defenses.

First contact with the aliens! He had been set down on this deserted, empty planet of an undistinguished star nearly a month ago, living bait and alarm system. The first-in scoutship had landed a year ago, reported its landing—and vanished. A second scout, forwarned of danger, the same.

Little chance of double malfunction or simple physical attack; a scout craft's screens could hold off any gross battering long enough to cry warning. The prime possibility was a purely mental attack. The Brains, the great, sentient computers that charted the course of history to come had picked Dean, tested and trained him to resist this kind of attack. Still he had nearly failed.

His transmitter hurled its warning forth across the parsecs. "Okaro to Base. Dean Okaro to Sector Base III. Am under attack. Projected illusions. Earth-normal scene, except for two suns."

He spoke each word clearly, slowly despite his excitement. The computers could unscramble the message easily, given his voice prints for comparison . . .

The tap-tap-tapping of his mallet was the only sound, deep under the earth. He crouched there in the gloom, scarcely able to see the pattern he was chipping in the stone. It had to be done right or the Gods would be angry, the hunt would fail. The people would go hungry, and it would be his fault.

Behind him Ee-La placed another fragment of wood on the fire. Hers was the equally important task of tending the sacred flames, making the scanty supply of fuel last until his work was done. Too little flame, and he could not see. Too much, and the light would not last.

His eyes ached as he followed the lines. The charcoal strokes lay dark against the gray rock. This line was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the stream. There the prey would come to drink. This line, the wind. It must not carry the hunter's scent ahead. A heavier line, rising and falling. The land that upheld hunter and hunted alike. This row of dots, the footsteps of the hunter. That one, larger, more solid; the hunted.

Now they came together—but the light was fading fast. Fading, as the day would fade if the hunter ran too slow. Ee-La stirred the coals, coaxing a last flicker of orange against the dark. He worked faster, mallet falling in a frenzy of blows. The last spark faded, but he was done! The hunt would not fail. Leaving his tools where they had fallen he led the way toward the light of day. Ee-La followed close, anxious to be out from under the weight of the Sacred Mountain.

The air was fresh and good beneath the low arching trees. Ee-La stood close, her eyes raised to his. Like chips of emerald against her pale blue skin . . .

* * *

Dean wrenched himself back to reality. He spoke stacatto phrases into the microphone, telling of this latest attack on his mind. Every detail would be of value, revealing vital facts about this enemy. Facts that could perhaps be put together to make a larger pattern of strengths and weaknesses. It was already plain that they were not from this tiny barren world, with its reddish sun. He let his mind drift, eager for more knowledge . . .

Again the suns beat down, darkening his leathery skin from blue to purple. His whip, symbol of status as field-foreman, dangled idly from his wrist. The workers, knee deep in squelchy brown mud, moved more slowly as his attention wandered. He drank sparingly from his flask, the trace of drug in the water bracing his will. Once more the workers quickened their movements, their drowsing minds responsive to his commands. At the back of his own mind was a dull resentment. To drive cattle such as these! They were the dregs of the work force, good for nothing but the simplest, most repetitive tasks. He must keep his thoughts almost on a level with theirs, or contact would be lost.

"Ho, Darveel!" The laughing voice broke in on his thoughts. "Bring your workers to high-suns meal."

"Gladly, Jarvon."

The workers straightened broad backs, setting down their baskets of seedlings. There *was* a wholeness here, a rightness between the slow, heavy movements and their earthy task. Broad flat feet left splotches of glistening mud on the trampled ground as they crowded about the food cart.

"How goes the planting?" On some hot afternoon a bored field-foreman had called a worker from her tasks to relieve the tedium. Jar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

von was the result, a mind of at least moderate power housed in the body of a small worker-woman. Idly Darveel sent out a command for her to approach.

"It goes well. The plants are setting in as rapidly as might be expected. These brutes are but poor things, barely able to move one flat foot past the other without guidance."

He frowned. The compulsion was having no effect. He pulled harder.

"They are good enough for work such as this." She smiled, pointed teeth pink against azure lips. "Surely so skilled a field-foreman has no trouble guiding them."

This was ridiculous! She still hadn't moved any nearer . . . and he had the strangest urge to get down on all fours. His teeth clenched as he made a greater effort. The workers had done eating, were wandering off to sit under a nearby grove of trees for unauthorized rest. No matter.

Jarvon was approaching one slow step at a time, but he was sinking to one knee.

Stronger! Fiercer! The drive that had brought him from humble clerk to field-foreman now centered on Jarvon. She stood before him, her slender six-fingered hand unbelting her coarse tunic.

He was down on both knees, straining to keep his body erect. His will beat like a roaring gale: Jarvon was a slender reed that bent and sprang erect. He struggled to his feet, his eyes locked with hers. Now each tried to force the other to give way. Feet braced wide on the muddy ground, they swayed like dancers to unheard music.

She dropped to one knee, her tunic falling away, then to both knees. She lay full length, belly to the ground. He crouched beside her. Slowly, slowly she rolled onto her back . . . but her eyes told him that somehow she had won, he had lost . . .

* * *

"Dean Okaro to Base. More data on enemy. This episode seems to be from early history of their civilization." He told of the fragment of life he had lived, knowing how vital any scrap of information could be. Once conquered, this race could contribute much to the Great Crusade . . .

The two armies were drawn up in precise array. On two low hills the commanding generals faced each other, ready for the supreme test. Dilleshon might have been a pale blue statue, but for a droplet of sweat that trickled from beneath his helmet. The tension . . . Oh, the tension!

One step forward! Again silence. Then the sound of the other army moving as one man. One step. Then two. Now he was moving again, lending his will to the massed mental force of his fellows. Behind them the General led and drove. The swordsmen of the front rank

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

met the foe. Now fast, now slow they cut and slashed. Faster as their massed will commanded, slow as the enemy's force prevailed.

The helmet pressed down on Dilleshon's skull. Open at the back, it was supposed to shield him from the enemy's commands. He was strong! They were moving faster now, hurling their will before them. The enemy swirled away, falling and dying. The General was stronger, his will striking like a lance at the enemy's heart!

Their foes were falling, dropping to the ground before they were even touched by steel. There would be triumph tonight, enemy women dancing to their commands. Victory to the strong!

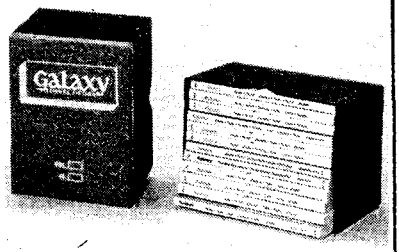
But no. What was this? Behind them the enemy sprang erect. He was cut off from his fellows. The mass will faltered, dissolved into chaos. His helmet was struck from his head, and he turned to flee.

No use. He and his fellows were marching once more, but their weapons were gone. Their armor lay scattered on the field of battle. They would watch, but the women would not be dancing for them. Dimly he sensed the truth, that strength was not enough without intelligence to show the way . . .

* * *

The defenses of Dean's scout were weakening, but still he broadcast his message. The aliens' own strengths would be turned against

THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR GALAXY



We are pleased to introduce the *Galaxy* Library Organizers —custom designed volume binders which will file and preserve up to 12 issues of your *Galaxy* collection.

Each durable black and tan vinyl case is handsomely embossed in gold with the *Galaxy* logo. Priced at $4.95 each; 3 for $14, 6 for $24, including shipping and handling. Send your check or money order and coupon below to:

GALAXY
P.O. Box 5121
Philadelphia, Pa. 19141
Please send me ____Galaxy Library Organizers. I have enclosed $____(Make payable to Jesse Jones Box Corp.)

NAME_____
ADDRESS_____
CITY_____
STATE_____ZIP_____

Offer good in U.S.A. only.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, and the computers would tell them how it could be done. He could watch the illusions now without wholly losing himself in them. Each life-fragment taught him more about the powers that he fought. If rescue came in time, he might even . . .

The fat-bellied ships lurched ahead. Long weeks of empty ocean lay behind. Ahead? No man knew. Old sailors told of monsters, guarding cities paved with gold. Or else of waters pouring over the edge of the world, taking unwary ships with them into eternity. Dalseth was roused from his thoughts by a cry from aloft.

"Land ho!"

In response to that most welcome of shouts, several men scrambled aloft, eager to see for themselves. Too often they had been fooled by low lying clouds, but this time it was true. It was land, green with trees. White surging waves on crimson sand. There should be food, and cool water to drink. They found a cove and dropped anchor.

Solid ground felt strange under his feet. It had been long indeed since they had been ashore. First pirates had pursued them, driving them far out to sea and away from the normal shipping lanes. They had been saved only by the rain and darkness of a sudden storm, though this too had taken them even farther from land.

Worst of all, their hull had become so fouled that they could not beat their way back against the prevailing winds. All they could do was to forge ahead, hoping to find land before their water was gone.

Dalseth led one of the exploring parties. They eased along through the tangled jungle growth, weapons at the ready. Men such as he, who could control the minds of animals, were rare, and their power over lesser minds was weak. Already they had found good water and fresh fruits. They were following a game trail when Dalseth sensed movement ahead. A shout and one of the sailors was down, an arrow in his throat!

Then Dalseth seized control of the savage minds and the ambush died as suddenly as it had begun.

Weapons falling limply from their hands, the natives waited passively as the sailors surged forward, intent on vengeance.

"No," snapped Dalseth, "we'll take them back to the ship. The Captain'll want to see them, find out what he can about them and their tribe. Four of you carry Vorlupp's body. We'll give him proper burial back at camp."

The natives were small folk, their dusky bluish hides stretched tightly over frail bones. Their minds which were poorly developed, told of others who lived farther inland. These, they said, were great warriors who lived in large villages.

When the seasonal winds changed the ships would sail for home, the Captain decided. They would bear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word of this new land, so ripe for the taking. Other ships would follow in their wake, and soon this land would deliver up its riches . . .

* * *

Dean heard the clangor of riven metal as the shell of his scout resisted the attack. His screens were drained, but he still had some time left, and power for his transmitter. This race too would fall to the forces of righteousness; once again the Great Crusade would gather in new converts. Earth could not fail. The whole galaxy would join in hymns of praise.

When at last all intelligence was as one in God's sight, then the task would be done. But as long as there were whole races denied the right to Glory they must press onward.

Dean's hand ached from gripping the base of the microphone, but a little pain was nothing to a True Believer. His piety and quick wits had brought him to this distant planet. He hardly remembered his childhood in the slums of Johannesburg. Whether or not he returned from this mission alive, the name of Dean Okaro would be enshrined . . .

The derrai shuffled his feet in the sand, setting himself to meet the animal's charge. Behind the insulating screens the crowd watched avidly.

The huge unibos moved forward slowly at first, then, silver horn gleaming against black hide, it charged. Empty-handed, clad only in silken shorts he waited, poised, unmoving.

The picture built in his mind and he sent it forth. The unibos swerved the merest fraction, but it was enough. The beast's shoulder brushed his as it thundered by.

The unibos was herded away. Two jungle cats were let in. Their minds were small but cunning, hard to reach. They circled the arena, scaly hides gleaming in the light of the two suns. One cat yowled as it caught his scent, but now he was ready. They sprang at a small herbivore. It dashed away. Hunting screams echoed as they charged after it, circling the arena. Try as they would, it stayed always just out of the hot sand refusing to move until efforts.

At last they lay sprawled on the hot sand refusing to move until prodded. He was proud of that illusion. Last game-time a contestant had taken the image of a tree in the minds of the jungle cats. One cat had sharpened its claws on his bark, ending the trial.

He faced them all, one by one and in twos and threes. These minds could not be compelled; they could only be led astray. At last the ultimate test. A single door swung open across the darkened arena. Again, dead silence from the stands. The beast that slouched toward him was smaller than some, its hairless hide an unhealthy grayish tan. Eyeless head, fanged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mouth ringed with multiple feelers, great claws twitching with lust to kill.

The derrai held himself to calmness, but it was not easy. The klemnil was the bane of his race, a horror from out of the misty past. A cave dweller, it came out only at night to seek its victims. The feelers that ringed its jaws picked up mind-casts. It would head unerringly toward the strongest source, nor could it be misled. The brain in that domed skull knew no common lusts. The blood and flesh that fed its body were only incidental to its true hunger; fear, agony, and hate were the nourishment required of its hideous soul.

The derrai projected a calm that he did not truly feel. Sweat beaded his brow as the klemnil advanced. Stumpy legs carried it forward, its head weaving on its sinuous neck. He projected peace and love, the warm community of family and clan.

Its approach was slower now, tendrils writhing uneasily. The Derrai's thoughts strenghtened, happy laughter and children playing in the sunlight. In his mind a boy and girl walked hand in hand through a park where shy animals played.

The klemnil recoiled, seeking darkness. He projected bright sunlight and happiness.

It whimpered, the first sound it had made since entering the arena. It screamed its hate, trumpeting death and fear to the world. Derrai sent friendship and trust. Its screams died away to a moan of agony. It clawed blindly at the sand, seeking cool darkness, a place to skulk and hide.

Joy and laughter! Triumph of light!

The klemnil howled its torment and ran from derrai. It reared its full length up the stadium wall, clawing at the unyielding barrier. Fangs caught at the insulating webbing, and a section pulled free! Now the surging emotions of the crowd broke through, battering the creature with their strength. Torn by emotion beyond its capacity to absorb the klemnil writhed blindly and fell to the sand.

The beast was dragged away by clanking machines even as the victor was escorted from the stadium in triumph. No other contestant, he was sure, would make a better showing. The prize would be his, and the honor. For a mere sergeant in the space-fleet his victory was a heady one. His talent was rare and valuable out where strange animals and stranger peoples were to be found . . .

★ ★ ★

Dean sat drenched in his own sweat, only dimly aware of the blue figures filing past. The magnitude of the mental battle he had fought had drained him utterly, but at last he was free, free of all past mental influences, free to battle with all his soul in the Great Crusade—of the derrai. ★

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BEST FROM Galaxy

VOLUME III

Edited by James Baen

THE BEST FROM GALAXY, VOLUME III is, very simply, the best of the best. Hours of reading pleasure by the finest writers of science fiction: such sf luminaries as Isaac Asimov, Joe Haldeman, Ursula K. Le Guin (her Nebula winning "The Day Before the Revolution"), Frederik Pohl, R.A. Lafferty, Robert Sheckley and many more are represented here with their finest works.

THE BEST FROM GALAXY, VOLUME III is not "just another anthology." Look for it.

An Award Book. Coming Soon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DIRECTIONS

Dear Jim:

Regarding Fred Pohl's article "A Short Term Solution" in the April issue of Galaxy. I enjoy all of Fred's writing, both in articles like this and the science fiction stories he writes. However, in the problem-solving part of this article, attributed to Peter Fong of Emory University, I think I can demonstrate, with a few simple illustrations, that this particular way will not work. I realize that it is easy to criticize, and very hard to come up with new ideas, and I might add, I wish his solution *would* work.

First, without re-stating too much of his article, was the use of forty-acre farms for a million and one half hard core unemployed, to grow corn, which in turn was to be made into grain alcohol, food and oil. The alcohol to be used as fuel supplement. It was stated that this would produce an income of approximately $12,000 per family.

Now, regardless of how good a theory may sound, if it is based on *wrong* information, then any results worked out, using this theory, are likely to be wrong also. Here then are the wrong assumptions in the theory:

1. Forty acres of average farm land in the non-irrigated areas will only produce approximately 100 bushels of corn per acre, or a total of 4,000 bushels of corn. I just checked the *Wall Street Journal* and find the price of corn to be $2.80 per bushel, or a total of $11,200. Of course, the yield and price would vary from different areas and the price varies each year, depending on the supply. This does not vary too much from Fred's statements.

2. The above figures were made, though, from the entire forty acres, leaving nothing for gardens, buildings, etc., and presumably means using the same land year after year to grow corn only. This simply cannot be done. Even adding tremendous amounts of chemical fertilizer the yield will go down annually until eventually it would be less than twenty-five bushels per acre. As any good farmer knows, you cannot grow one crop on a tract of land for more than two or three years without some kind of rotation with a legume or green manure crop to be plowed under (alfalfa, clover, cowpeas, etc.) to keep the fertility up to normal. Most farmers use a cattle and pasture, hay or legume and a row crop (corn, etc.) in rotation, with never more than fifty percent of the land in row crop at any given time, and *any* fertilizer is rather expensive today.

3. Nothing is said about tools for these farmers. Go out and price tractors, plows, cultivating equipment, and you will see it takes a small fortune to even get started farming today. And to justify that expense, you have to have far more land per farm to simply break even. This is why most of the small farms have been sold to form much larger ones. Simple economics. No profit, no farms.

4. The final part of the theory that is wrong is that very few of the hard-core-unemployed know anything about farming, nor is this something that can be learned in a few class sessions. Farmers, of necessity have to be knowledgable in good farming practices, hard working, thrifty and have a pretty good ability to plan their work months ahead. This still does not allow for drouths plant pests and generally poor growing conditions that affect all farmers each year.

This still does not mean that all of the idea is bad. Although it would not use the unemployed to accomplish it, I would suggest an alternate plan of *inducing all present farmers* to increase their corn acreage to ten to twenty acres per farm, with a governmen guarateed market for their corn to be used in the making of alcohol. This would achieve part of the plan, and there may be many more ways of doing it that as yet simply

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needs to be worked out. We all know that this country and the whole world can use all the best brains available to overcome the problems we face, many of which Fred covered in his articles. Maybe other readers will have new ideas to add to this.

Best wishes,
Sincerely,
Ed Woods

P. O. Box 209
Pearce, Arizona 85625

Fred's reply:

Dear Jim:

Reader Woods makes a couple of good points, but he also makes a couple of assumptions. First, he assumes chemical fertilizer; that't not what Fong (or I) had in mind at all; the farms should be fertilized by that sovereign replenisher of soil, city sewage. In fact, that's the whole point. And if you're going to pipe sewage from Washington or New York, you might as well pipe the water that carries it, too, which provides irrigation.

The second assumption (which is not covered in the essay) is that conventional energy-intensive farming is involved. It takes fuel to run tractors; in fact, it takes fuel to *make* tractors—something of the order of 50,000 kwh to manufacture each one. For a forty-acre farm, or even one two or three times that size, there is a splendid prime mover available in the shape of the horse.

Where Woods is absolutely right is in saying that farming is not something you pick up in an afternoon. (I've cleared enough brush and picked a sufficient number of potato bugs off the vine to appreciate the skills involved.) I am not sure how serious this problem is. The ghettoized urban poor, mostly blacks from the Old South and Hispanics from Puerto Rico, Mexico or elsewhere (depending on which urban area you're talking about) do in fact come to the cities in the first place because they can't survive on exactly the same sort of farms Fong is proposing, but the reason is not that they are unskilled, only that they don't own the land and are thrown out of work by mechanization. Does any of that skill survive in the year 1975? I don't know. Obviously there are hundreds of thousands of young people who are second- or third-generation city dwellers, but equally obvious there are large numbers who grew up on such farms and worked them. There is a reservoir there of exactly the skills that are needed. How large it is we won't know until someone starts taking the idea seriously.

Which I hope will be soon!

Bests,
Fred Pohl

Dear Mr. Baen:

I have noticed recently that *Galaxy* has been including some very good stories, with good effects—reminiscent of Edgar Allen Poe.

Poe believed that a short story should be written to cause one, and only one, emotional reaction. Some of your shorter pieces in the April 75 issue have reflected just this.

In example, "Elmo's Box". I gave it a quick reading and then reread it. It gives the reader something to think about when messing around in alternate universes. Although it may not explore all of the possibilities (after all, they *are* infinite!), they were food for thought. And that is what a short story, about a subject and not really telling a full story, should do.

The same. "A Game of Blood And Dust" gives one something to think about.

"Cheap Thrills", possible and frightening future and one way of escaping it.

"Dea Ex Machina". On a much larger scale, and with a bit more plot, "Day of the Gringo".

You see, all of these short stories told rather simple tales, with simple plots and simple climaxes. But they all made the reader *think!* And that is why your magazine is considered thought-provoking and fascinating.

Please keep it that way.

Scott C. Smith

10418 Hayvenhurst Avenue
Granada Hills, Ca. 91344

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jim,

Galaxy's been very good the past couple months, but it just isn't *If*. Please, please, please bring *If* back. On onionskin with cardboard covers, or charge a dollar, or a dollar fifty, or, wait—how about *microfilm?* Anything, but please bring *If* as soon as possible. I really like Jerry's column, but I prefer him to cover subjects such as memory, or—sigh—black holes. His article on Velikovsky was good, but it wasn't as mind-boggling as the black hole articles. I mean, what do a few planets tossed around matter when you could be talking about universes? I also really like Geis's bi-monthly, but I'd prefer it monthly. Keep up the good work, and *please* bring back If.

Ken Sheridan

PO 851 P.E.A.
Exeter, NH 03833

Would if I could.

Dear Mr. Baen,

I am, I suppose, one of your younger readers, being only 17, and I have only been a subscriber to your magazine(s?) for about a year. Being an avid collector, however, I have bought up back issues for about the last ten years. All this gives me a fresh (I hope) viewpoint, and if I may, I would like to make a few suggestions.

To a casual reader, one who picks magazines off the shelves occasionally, the packaging is what sells the magazine. (Obviously, if a magazine is filled with Known Authors and the others aren't, it will sell, but for the average mag, it's the packaging that sells.) In my opinion Mr. Jacobsen fell down in this department. This is not to say that he was a bad editor; anyone who can reel in A Time of Changes, Rendezvous With Rama, and The Gods Themselves isn't a bad editor by any definition. However the outward appearances of the magazine suffered. The cover design, until late in his editorship (?) was shoddy, and the artwork was poor. This last was due, I think, to an overworked Jack Gaughan. He can do excellent work, but largely didn't. For an extreme example of this, look at the frontpiece to the Cap Kennedy novel (yes, I know it's a juvenile) *A World Aflame*. Anyone in a High School Art 1 class can draw better than that. On the other hand, his cover to *The Indian Giver* (in that other magazine) was superb. Get him to draw like that all the time and I'll be happy. I think Wendy Pini is also terrific, as are most of the rest of the regular crew.

Another thing to avoid is the use on the cover of such descriptions as "Powerful New Novelettes," "Barrier-smashing Stories," "Gripping New . . ." "Big New. . . ," and above all else, ! ! ! ! ! exclamation marks. Far from attracting a prospective reader, these will cause him to turn away in disgust. So far you've avoided the descriptions, but the exclamation points still creep in, and I honestly believe they stink.

On the inside you've made many changes for the good, especially that ugly title page of Jacobson's. There are still a few things which would, I think improve the looks still more. First, I would like to see the name (the full name) of the artist for each story. It's their work, and they should receive credit for it. Second, get a new design for the SF calendar; the present one is a pretty sad drawing. Definitely the science column should be kept up; I read Dr. Pournelle's articles first when the magazine comes. Whatever happened to the books section, get it going again, for it is a must. A brief, or even not-so-brief things-to-come column would be great, and something like Analog's Analytical Laboratory also, so the readers can indicate their preferences.

I have but one complaint on your stories, and that concerns Craig Strete. Maybe it's just me, but I simply can't stand his stories. They are pointless, dull and I find it a real chore to plow through them. I keep hoping he'll improve, but he hasn't yet.

And finally, to the physical package itself. I find the stiff covers are much superior to the old slick ones. They hold up much better BUT; even quarter-inch steel can't protect a magazine unless it's packaged. The US mail is not known for its gentleness, and many things get damaged. Just a week ago I wrote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to your subscription dept., and mentioned on the side this issue, and yesterday my July issue came with a BIG RIIIIP in the cover. I am a collector, and find this intolerable. If it's too expensive to wrap every magazine, set up an optional program for collectors to receive their magazines in manila envelopes like F&SF has done. Their service costs a dollar, and is well worth it.

On the whole, however, you have been an excellent editor, and I hope you continue in that position for many years.

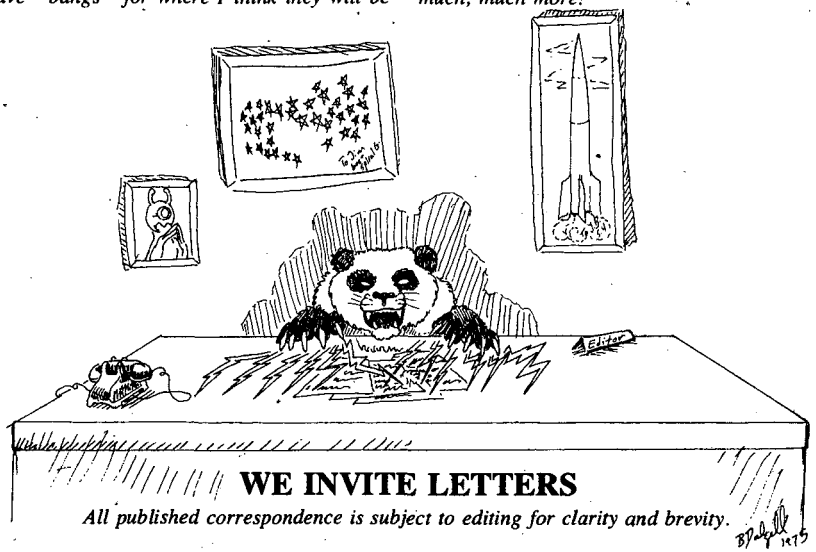
Hopefully yours,
Gordon Adams

51 Valencia Rd.
Orinda, CA 94563

In defence of Jack, let me point out that the Cap Kennedy covers, both his and others, are all done in a particular pulpish style specified by the publisher. Some people like it, even—and a lot of people buy that series . . . .I'm not sure I agree that the exclamation mark should be outlawed . . . in fact, I suspect, it's not enthusiasm that repulses you so much as phoney enthusiasm! Personally I save "bangs" for where I think they will be effective. . . .Craig Strete has certainly played to mixed reviews; on the other hand, people as diverse as Joanna Russ, Don Wollheim, James Tiptree and myself think he has something special. . . .As you will be aware by the time this issue sees print, Bookshelf *is alive and well—AND* A STEP FARTHER OUT *isn't stepping out of Galaxy. . . .As for your beef about damaged covers, it's out of my hands—but I'll pass it on to the proper parties . . . .And I thank you for your support (!).*

Well, that about wraps up the first 25 years of Galaxy.

The second quarter-century will start off with the first half of a novel by Joanna Russ entitled WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO. . . . *It's about a group of stranded space travelers who* don't *recreate a civilization. Another goodie is a guest appearance by Larry Niven, co-authoring with J.E. Pournelle (who else?) a double-length* A STEP FARTHER OUT *that is not only a science column, but a short-course in writing the* hard *sf novel. And, (as the saying goes) much, much more!*



WE INVITE LETTERS

All published correspondence is subject to editing for clarity and brevity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GALAXY/IF S-F MART

Galaxy

235 East 45 Street
New York N.Y. 10017

50¢ per word per issue (including name and address) or 3 issues $1.00 per word. 10-word minimum. Payment with order.

if

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

SF — FANTASY MAGAZINES: 1927-1974. Over 4,000 magazines, including 2,500 pulps. Many complete and partial runs, o.p. hardbounds, photo-duplicated pulp covers. Collections purchased. List free. Roy Torgeson, 148 East 74th Street, NY, NY 10021. Call evenings and weekends: (212) 988-7526.

SF — Fantasy and RADICAL SCIENCE books. Hundreds of titles. Discounts. Free lists. Tyche Books, Box 24413-G, Oakland, Calif. 94623.

How to Think about the Problem of Designing a Subculture. "As you have gathered we are not technologists but aestheticists who have acquired our technical knowledge deliberately to insure its proper development and usage. We have found that it is ignorance that perverts aesthetic and human values not technical knowledge." $3 for two volumes, 112 pages total, and one issue of Detour magazine. Interactive Concerns Group, 4754 N. Harding, Chicago, Ill. 60625.

WHIZZARD, a science fiction fanzine. Send $1.00 to: Marty Klug, 125B Florwood Court, St. Louis, Missouri 63135.

WANTED TO BUY — All issues of science fiction and fantasy magazines from 1926 to 1965. Harry Bennett, 6763 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA, 90028.

Poetry Market Newsletter — Send self-addressed envelope for information: Minotaur, Box 678A, Eagle River, Alaska 99577.

SF MYSTERIES, WESTERNS. Three for $1.00! Free lists. Publications/15, 3121 Rendale, Richmond, Va. 23221.

FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION books for sale. Free lists. Gordon Barber, 35-G Minneapolis Ave., Duluth, MN. 55803.

BRAIN THEORY NEWSLETTER Advances in cybenetics, brain modeling. theoretical psychology. Sample copy $1.00. GRC A-248, U. Mass., Amherst, Mass. 01002.

BOOK AND MAGAZINE READERS! Send wants to: S & S Books, G-10, 80 North Wilder, St. Paul, Minn. 55104.

MISCELLANEOUS

Genuine, antique engravings. Over 100 years old. Framed. Quantities limited. $10.00 each. Klein Galleries, 139 E. Arch St., Mansfield, Ohio 44903.

AMERICAN-MEXICAN INTRODUCTIONS "Free" Details. World, Box 3876-GAL, San Diego, Calif. 92103.

REMEMBER *RADIO* science fiction? "Dimension-X", "Escape", Bradbury, Pohl, Asimov. . .Catalogue: $2.00 (REFUNDABLE). Catalogue + *TWO* COMPLETE PROGRAMS: $5.98! Specify: CASSETTE / 8-TRACK / REEL. American Radio, Box 3493-SF, Riverside, Calif. 92509.

PYRAMIDOLOGY: For extensive information send two stamps. Pyramids, 8143 Big Bend, Webster Groves, Mo. 63119.

FABULOUS FLYING STARS, Japanese martial arts target practice as seen on Kung Fu. $3.00 (four or more 20% off), SHURIKEN, 144 West 19 St., NY, NY 10011.

TEKTITES — black and pitted like Meteors, astronomers believe they are either Moonrock, Spacerock, or the result of Meteoric impact: Genuine Thailand Tekite on 24" Silver Finish Chain, also fits on keychain, bracelet, $5.00. Astrahan, Department TG, Box 341, Saugerties, NY 12477.

MAIL ORDER ACTION

DIRECT ACTION AT LOW COST — in GALAXY S-F MART. 50 cents per word per issue or $1.00 per word for three issues. More than 70,000 potential customers. Classified ads in GALAXY S-F MART bring results! Write S-F Mart, Galaxy / 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.

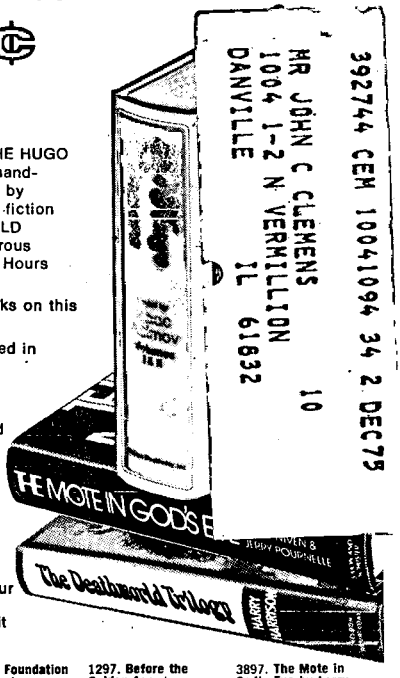
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The very best reading in or out of this world

4 FOR 10¢
with membership

392744 CEM 10041094 34 2 DEC75
MR JOHN C CLEMENS
1004 1-2 N VERMILLION
DANVILLE IL 61832
10



Choose any 4 books, including these science fiction greats: THE HUGO WINNERS, Volume I & II — 23 gripping short stories. A giant, handsome 864-page record of greatness. THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle. ". . . possibly the finest science fiction novel I have ever read."—*Robert A. Heinlein.* THE DEATHWORLD TRILOGY by Harry Harrison. Follow Jason dinAlt on his dangerous voyage in these 3 novels set on the galaxy's deadliest planets. Hours of thrills and adventure.

What a way to get acquainted. Browse through the list of books on this page and choose any 4 for just 10¢.

It's the most extraordinary sample of science fiction ever offered in one package.

Here's how the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your choice of 4 books for just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). If not absolutely fascinated, return them within ten days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin describing the 2 coming Selections and Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the form always provided, and return it to us by the date specified. We try to allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you don't get the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. Most books are only $1.98 plus shipping and handling. Some extra value selections are slightly higher but always much less than Publisher's Editions. Send no money. But do send the coupon today.

Science Fiction Book Club 45-S119

Dept. HR 157, Garden City, New York 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____
Please print

Address _____ Apt. ____

City _____ State _____ Zip ____

6221. **The Foundation Trilogy.** By Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. An SF classic. Comb. Price $16.85

8037. **Again, Dangerous Visions.** Harlan Ellison, ed. Short stories and novels, 46 in all. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $12.95

8532. **The Hugo Winners, Vol. I & II.** Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

3632. **The Deathworld Trilogy.** By Harry Harrison. On 3 amazing planets interplanetary adventurer Jason dinAlt gambles his life against different lethal environments. Special Edition.

1297. **Before the Golden Age.** Isaac Asimov, ed. 26 classic stories of the 1930s, from vintage SF pulps, now in one huge volume. Pub. ed. $16.95

7211. **The Land That Time Forgot.** By Edgar Rice Burroughs. 3 novels in one, includes **The People That Time Forgot** and **Out of Time's Abyss.** Soon to be released movie. Special Edition.

6759. **The Shockwave Rider.** By John Brunner. By early 21st century a data information net threatens the people as privacy becomes obsolete. By Hugo Award winning author. Pub. ed. $8.95

7138. **Enchanted Pilgrimage.** By Clifford D. Simak. Chilling adventures of a modern man in a universe of medieval monsters and mores. Pub. ed. $6.95

3897. **The Mote in God's Eye** by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle. Man's first contact with an intelligent alien species. Pub. ed. $9.95

6288. **The 1975 Annual World's Best SF.** Donald A. Wollheim, ed. Includes George R. R. Martin's **A Song For Lya** plus 9 top tales by Pohl, Asimov, Kornbluth, others. Spec. Ed.

3624. **Approaching Oblivion.** By Harlan Ellison. Eleven mind-spinning stories in the multi-award winner's new anthology. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $8.95

7104. **The Best of Cordwainer Smith.** 12 outstanding SF stories includes **The Lady Who Sailed the Soul, Golden the Ship Was, Oh! Uh! Oh!, A Planet Named Shayol.** Spec. Ed.

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED